

FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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News

Britain

Unequal incomes

Another report* confirms the rapidly-growing disparities in income distribution over a decade of Conservative governments. The number of people living in poverty, at below half average income, reached 12 million in 1988/9, 22 per cent of the population, a rise of 7 million on 1979. One quarter of all children, 3.1 million, live below this poverty level. DAVID REED examines the new figures.

The report shows that income disparities (adjusted for household size, composition and disposable income) have widened. Whereas average real income increased by 30 per cent after housing costs (AHC) between 1979 and 1988/9, that of the bottom 10 per cent (decile) fell by 6 per cent, with the next four deciles showing increases from 2 per cent to 20 per cent, that is, rising with higher incomes but well below the average (see figure 1).

As a result the lowest 10 per cent of the population saw its share of total income fall (AHC) from 4.0 per cent to 2.5 per cent while that of the bottom half fell from 32 per cent in 1979 to 27 per cent in 1988/9. The proportion of people living below average income in 1979 (AHC) was 59 per cent; by 1988/9 this had risen to 61 per cent.

This means that those in households with incomes above the average have seen their incomes rise rapidly, the rise accelerating with growing in-

comes. The better-off have benefited most. This is not surprising given the overall rise of real earnings of 26 per cent for those in work and the government's taxation and benefits policies.

This has meant that while there has been a rise in the number of people earning below £50 a week and a marked fall in the numbers between £100 and £200 a week due to incomes becoming more dispersed, there has been a sharp rise of people in income bands above £250 a week in 1988/9 compared with 1979.

* Households below average income: A statistical analysis 1979-1988/9 HMSO 1992.

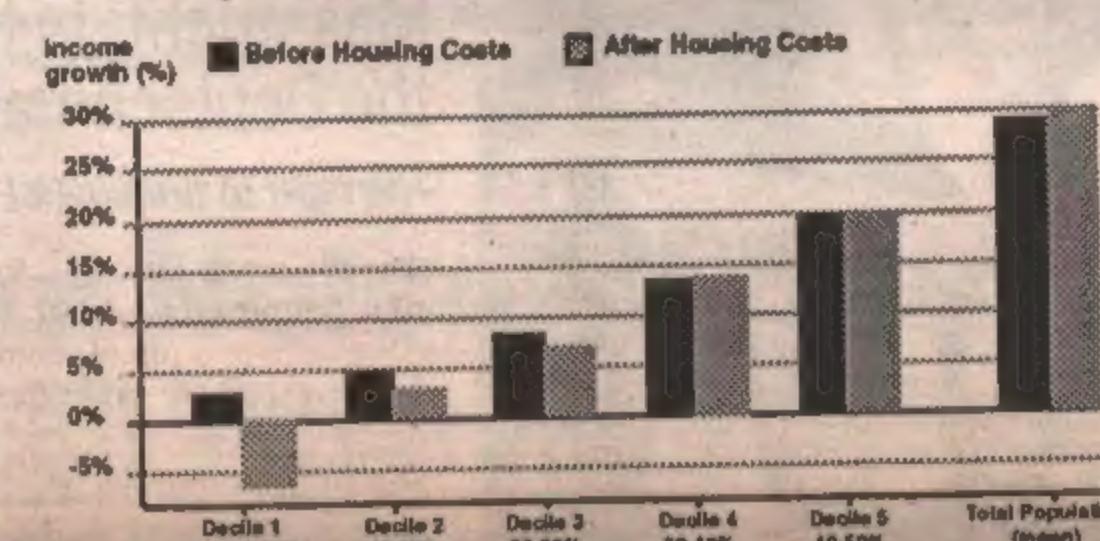


Figure 1: Real income growth by decile group 1979 to 1988/9

BT: putting profits first

BOB SHEPHERD

In a secret ballot, the workers of Burnsall Ltd, an electroplating company based at 10 Downing Street, Smethwick in Birmingham, voted unanimously for strike action from 15 June. The 28 workers on strike are members of the GMB, which their employers have refused to recognise. The workforce is predominantly Punjabi, though work has continued with white, unionised men. Male strikers were banned from the picket by the police after false allegations that they had injured one of the scabs, and the picket is being organised and run by the women.

This attack has met with little resistance. This year BT had a target of 24,000 jobs to go in a voluntary redundancy scheme. Over 50,000 workers applied! Our union, the NCU, at its conference last year, had overturned previous union policy of opposition to all redundancies.

Not content with cutting costs by axing jobs, BT is now expanding 'homeworking'. In the past some engineers have worked from home; now, in an experiment, directory enquiry operators in Scotland are being based at home. These high-tech homeworkers will be video-linked to supervise them and ensure they are working. For BT the attractions are clear: none of the costs of maintaining a workplace and the complete isolation of the workers, who are mainly women. Is this the shape of things to come for women's labour - back in the home? The technology that we were told would liberate people is either leaving them unemployed or in a form of industrialised slavery.

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BT management's current in vogue slogan is 'putting customers first'. By customers they mean shareholders, and to put them first means cutting costs and boosting profits at the expense of workers. More job cuts and attacks on working conditions are on their way in BT.

The workforce have no paid holidays or pensions and one

ADAM SHERWOOD

Support the 10 Downing Street strikers!



The Burnsall strikers on the picket line

worker was threatened with the sack when she asked for time off to take her son to hospital. Workers have even been followed to the toilet to ensure that they do not waste time.

The Asian women, typically employed in unskilled jobs, include many who do not speak

Riots: signs of coming storms

MAXINE WILLIAMS

July saw outbreaks of rioting against police and property in both Salford, Manchester and Hartcliffe, Bristol. Police were attacked and a police van shot at, as unrest continued for several nights. The police responded with armed patrols. In Bristol, fighting has lasted for three nights as we go to press. Buildings have been attacked and police pelted with stones and bottles.

Both Salford and Hartcliffe are large working class areas lacking facilities and suffering high unemployment. In Salford, youth unemployment stands at around 40 per cent. In both areas, local youth complain of police harassment. In Bristol, the immediate spark for the events came when a stolen police motorbike (equipped with high tech surveillance equipment) was forced off the road by an unmarked police car and both riders killed.

The police, echoed by the press, responded to these events by claiming that criminal and gangster elements had orchestrated the protests. They said the same in 1981, they said the same in LA this year - in fact, they always claim this as the cause for social unrest. But to each other,



Youths on the Ordsall Estate, Manchester

the police and the government sing a different tune. In a document submitted to the Prime Minister after the recent election, the police pinpointed sixteen areas of potential unrest, including Salford. They warned that a sharp rise in long-term unemployment, coupled with the return of a Conservative government, had fuelled tension in inner-city areas. They said that there was growing despair in 'ghettos of poverty' including those in the affluent South. Last year Salford was refused extra government cash to deal with inner-city decay; this year Bristol was refused.

These anti-police outbreaks are signs of what is to come as sections of the working class are forced into poverty and its associated problems. Abandoned by all political parties, they will seek their voice by these means. The wealthy will call them criminal and seek to contain them by using the police and the prisons, knowing full well that British capitalism can no longer sustain the welfare state that might ameliorate their conditions. There will be many more such events in coming years. They are the distant, as yet unformed, rumbles of the storm to come.

Rail sell-off

MAXINE WILLIAMS

After a lot of delay caused by the sheer impracticality of the scheme, the government has finally announced its plans to privatise British Rail.

A wholesale sell-off is not possible because of the huge amount of investment needed to keep the trains running. Instead, the Tories' City friends will benefit by being sold the most profitable routes and stations at knock-down prices. BR will retain responsibility for the rails and the signals and so on; the tax payer will subsidise the profits of private companies.

The private companies will be interested in the inter-city routes where profits are possible and they can provide luxury services for businessmen. Fares on these routes are already beyond the pockets of many travellers. But what about the many routes which are necessary but unprofitable? In the past forty years the railways have been savaged. Transport planners have worshipped at the altar of the almighty car which clogs roads and spews out pollution.

British capital in its dynamic phase pioneered railways which were key to Britain's industrial development. Now, in its dotage, the British ruling class picks over and chews the bones of its past successes.



In the 19th century private railway accidents were common

Imperialist intervention in the Balkans

EDDIE ABRAHAMS

Estimates now put the death toll in the internecine wars engulfing Yugoslavia at 50,000. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees 2.2 million people have been driven from their homes. In the latter part of 1991, Slobodan Milosevic's Serbian government was engaged in deadly conflict against Franjo Tudjman's Croatian government. Today, despite continuing Serb-Croat clashes, they are in a tacit alliance to carve up the republic of Bosnia Herzegovina where both form a minority compared to the 44 per cent Muslim population. The war's chief victims are the working class of all the republics including the area's Muslim population.

Serbian and Croatian forces between them now control 90 per cent of Bosnia. They continue relentlessly to bombard Muslim-controlled areas reducing whole towns to rubble, killing thousands and looting and razing their homes. Ian Traynor of *The Guardian* writes of the Serbian 'politics of systematic terror, looting, purging and targeting of civilians'. An International Red Cross worker said the 'Croatian forces are committing the same atrocities where they are fighting in the west of Bosnia'. Both sides are engaged in 'ethnic cleansing' of areas under their control - a fascist genocide of other nationalities.

The working class has nothing to gain by backing any of the parties. With the break-up of Yugoslavia, the nascent bourgeoisies of the two largest republics - Serbia and Croatia - are fighting to secure the best territorial and economic advantage. To this end they are reviving ancient nationalist projects for a Greater Serbia or Croatia. Democratic ideals, the material needs and security of the working class do not count in their struggle for supremacy.

International intervention, particularly sanctions against Serbia by the EC and the UN, is prompted by self-interest. Militarily the most powerful of the republics it could emerge as a significant, though reactionary, force capable of upsetting imperialist plans for the region. Further, boosted by its victories, Serbian expansionism could spread the crisis and war.

For communists the principle of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' does not apply to the imperialist attempt to control Serb aggression. Socialists oppose intervention in the Balkans because imperialism will not play a progressive role. This, however, by no means implies support for the Serbian side whose expansionist ambitions were revealed long ago against the Albanian people in Kosovo.

There, Albanians form the majority of the population and until 1989 Kosovo was an autonomous republic. The Serbian government used brutal repression to annul the republic and in 1990 issued a decree to colonise Kosovo. As a result all Albanians have been removed from positions of influence to be replaced by Serbs. It is clear that the Serbs plan to continue this colonisation plan.

Presidential Elections

USA: 'the future must be stopped'

TREVOR RAYNE

'God gave Noah the rainbow sign. No more water - the fire next time!' *The Bible*

In the 1988 Presidential election 50.1 per cent of the electorate voted. In 1992 the majority will not vote. During the primaries earlier this year turn-out was down by as much as 38 per cent. In some states black voter participation was down by 40 to 80 per cent. Urging Jesse Jackson to relaunch the Rainbow Coalition, Alexander Cockburn and Andrew Kopkind write:

'Even at this late hour, the left could seize the initiative... The two formerly major parties are a shambles, the institutions of government and press despised, political authority disdained, and every measure of popular anger overflowing.' *New Statesman* 10 July

But Jesse will not run; he has endorsed Bill Clinton as the Democratic candidate and the left and progressive intelligentsia that circulate in the Democratic orbit will be an irrelevance to the multi-million dollar exercise in flattery and fraud that masquerades as 'democracy'.

The Rainbow Coalition that Jackson led in two Presidential campaigns in the 1980s combined the victims of the Reagan years, those displaced by de-industrialisation, those who opposed the US war on Central America and government sup-

port for apartheid with feminists, gays and lesbians and environmentalists and, at its core, were the organised black and Hispanic communities. These have been sacrificed by Jackson and snubbed by Clinton as the Democrats sniff power in the disillusionment of suburban middle class USA with George Bush.

Clinton, like Bush, represents corporate interests. His campaign advisers include lobbyists for the tobacco companies, the media transnationals, the oil companies, UNITA and Israel. Clinton supports the anti-Cuba Torricelli Bill. His programme, presented as Keynesian social



BILL CLINTON: Blowing hot air

democratic, is in fact a retreat from Dukakis' 1988 programme towards the Republican positions. Instead of government responsibility to provide for the poor, there is the responsibility of the poor to look after themselves. Instead of a criticism of wasteful military expenditure, there is the need to uphold 'the superiority of our military personnel and our technology'. 'An expanding entrepreneurial economy of high skill, high wage jobs is the most important family policy, urban policy, labour policy, minority policy and foreign policy America can have.' There could be no more naked appeal to the self-interest and prejudices of the better-off workers and middle classes.

Also included is a dangerous element of social engineering that appeals not just to the middle classes but also to the far right. Welfare provision is combined with compulsory employment, college education with public service. Dressed up in phrases like 'empowering welfare' and 'empowering education', the state is seeking to tighten its control over large sections of the working class that it perceives as dangerous, out of political control - the people who do not vote.

'The Future - stop it!'

The steady erosion of the US economy's global position is generating significant political developments in US society. David Duke, Pat Buchanan and

Ross Perot each in their own way combined appeals to the insecurity of the white working class and the frustrations and anxieties of some of the middle classes. These are fascistic appeals born of the inability of US capitalism to provide for more than part of black and Hispanic peoples and in a context where unemployment is growing at 1.5 million a year and poverty has grown by over 20 per cent to 34 million in the past decade.

At the same time the Los Angeles riot showed the distance between Jesse Jackson, the co-opted black establishment and the ghettos. Nothing can tie the oppressed to the political system; they are anathema to Clinton and Jackson who would have to risk their political careers to appeal to them. Their numbers are growing and the money has run out: public debt is more than \$3 trillion, corporate debt is \$1.30 for every \$1 produced. Keynesianism, liberal social engineering, buying large groups of people off - are out.

As one establishment commentator remarked after Los Angeles: 'I have seen the future and it must be stopped... Soon, in five years, in 10 years, I can only guess, we will have organised domestic terrorism in the USA'. Richard Reeves, *International Herald Tribune* 20 May.

The US left must have nothing to do with the Clinton campaign. Now is the time to go deeper and build the coalition with the forces that the US ruling classes truly fear. ■

Los Angeles riots

Seizing the time

WILLIAM HIGHAM

'The gangs are a power structure that you can't get around. They are there, and they can help you or they can kill you.' These are the words of Leon Watkins, a church minister in the wake of the recent truce between LA's biggest gangs, the Bloods and the Crips.

The truce, which was negotiated a week before the uprisings, brings together a combined membership of an estimated 100,000 youths, who joined the gangs in search of a sense of belonging and purpose they could find nowhere else.

Ex-gang member Too Loc explains: 'Your pops may be long gone, your mom's probably out holding down two or three jobs to pay for the roof over your head, so the only place you have to turn to is the street corner... We saw ourselves as soldiers given the responsibility of protecting our "hood" and we had a sense of belonging to something. Church didn't make us feel wanted, school was a waste of time but the gangs gave us a sense of purpose.'

Though not the major league criminals some would make out, gang members are certainly unafraid of using violence to get what they want. Says Loc: 'We saw that as part of the American way. Ain't nothing come to nobody unless they go out and take it by force. How do you

think they got this land? D'you think the Indians gave it to 'em?'

Former Crip OG (Original Gangster or older leader) Juan Longino adds: 'They see people who look just like them on America's Most Wanted and the like, doing hold-ups, dealing dope, doing drive-bys, and it seems the kids more or less become programmed.'

Mikey Massive of Britain's *Caribbean Times* sees the roots of the Bloods and the Crips in the Hispanic and Mexican-American youth groups of East LA who formed themselves into local protection groups in the aftermath of the 'Zoot Suit' rebellion of 1919, when their communities were under threat from gangs of sailors and raiding parties from the Ku Klux Klan. The African-American youth of South Central LA adopted the look and attitude of these groups, but as time went on, both they and the Hispanic/Mexican groups turned their aggression away from community defence and upon each other.

The mid-Sixties saw many gang members looking outwards again as they channelled their efforts into helping the Black Panthers. The FBI's COINTELPRO operation (responsible for the destruction of the Panthers) reopened divisions within the communities that ensured the gangs quickly returned to infighting. It was in the wake of this that the Crips and Bloods came into prominence.

Up until the truce, the Bloods and Crips were deadly rivals. Fights between the gangs saw two gang members killed and 16 injured every day in LA alone. With statistics like these, to have even considered a truce the gang leaders must have viewed the situation as very serious.

The Blood/Crips, as the new conglomeration is calling itself, has already come forward with a reconstruction programme for LA's inner city. The scheme is based, it would appear, on the Black Panther Party Platform and Programme, and has been christened simply The Plan. Although possibly lacking a far-reaching analysis, it is, as Alexander Cockburn said in a recent *New Statesman* article, 'infinitely the best scheme for recovering LA thus far offered' - not bad for an organisation the media would have us believe to be composed entirely of uneducated, drug-peddling hoodlums.

The programme calls for rebuilding, landscaping, better sanitation and street lighting; money spent on school buildings and equipment, plus large-scale improvements in educational standards; improvements in health care; a more controlled law and order policy; and economic investment (including loans for small businesses on competitive terms).

Welfare is to be removed from the community, and replaced by state work and manufacturing plants (although state money would be provided for invalids and the elderly); the Blood/Crips themselves are to identify the areas most in need of rebuilding etc; community policing is to be introduced

(although this will be strictly controlled); and businesses given loans are to be required to take 90 per cent of their workforce from the community.

In the recession the US cannot and will not provide funds for such projects - it failed to do so after the more widespread riots of the 1970s. Its favoured choice will be repression. Previously the police were content to let the gangs fight each other - indeed, they encouraged it. And, along with the media, they used the gangs as scapegoats for the US's worsening crime figures, especially in the area of drugs. If the truce continues, it will be difficult for them to maintain this image - so it is not surprising that recent reports suggest the police are trying to break it up.

The main question however is which direction 'The Plan' will take if the truce succeeds. There can be no doubt that any moves in a radical direction will be targeted by the state - just as the Black Panthers were targeted for destruction. As Bobby Seale wrote of the black youth in *Seize the Time*: 'They had to graduate from rocks and bottles and Molotov cocktails, Huey [Newton] was saying, to a level where they understood the proper use of organised guns and force, and where they understood what a political party represented when it started to go forth to liberate black people.'

The state will try either to subvert The Plan or wreck the truce. The issue will be whether the youth create a supergang mafia, descend again into internecine gang war, or through resistance to repression turn in a revolutionary direction. ■

Support the Kurdish liberation struggle

TREVOR RAYNE

'We shall demonstrate that the inheritance of the October Revolution has not been lost and that the memory of the heroic people who fought for it has not been forgotten.' So said Abdullah Ocalan, General Secretary of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) after the Turkish military's massacre of Kurdish people on Newroz 21 March.

The guerrilla war led by the PKK and its military arm, the People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (PKK) is developing in intensity of its operations. Operations involving 100 pro-guerrillas surrounding and eliminating Turkish bases show tactical advance on hit-and-run methods. In response the Turkish state has resorted to sustained aerial bombardment of villages and mountains where it suspects a guerrilla presence. June three Turkish jets, an F104 and a Phantom, were brought down by the ARK.

In the towns, the Turkish military is continuing its policy of terror and suppression of news. On 8 June Ozgur Gundem (Free Agenda) journalist Hafiz Aytemir was gunned dead by Turkish contras. The following day police abducted the body and buried it in Diyarbakir cemetery to prevent a demonstration planned for the funeral. Turkish Special Forces are training elements of the Hizballah Muslim fundamentalists as counter-gangs.



Cadres of the PKK

against the PKK and the national liberation struggle. At the same time they are posing as Hezbollah to confuse the Kurdish people. Such classic tactics of 'low-intensity operations' have the marks of NATO involvement. When ARK guerrillas on 26 June attacked a contra house the Turkish government in press reported it as a 'mosque'.

Concluding his address Abdullah Ocalan told his comrades and compatriots: 'Your support for our struggle must be the expression of an international outlook, as at the time of the October Revolution, or even higher; this must not be ignorant for a moment. This struggle is also your own struggle. Above all, it is the personal struggle of all those who say: "I am a socialist"; "I am a democrat"; "I am against what imperialism is doing because it is revolting and unacceptable".'

Socialists in Britain must give support to the national liberation struggle for Kurdistan and oppose the British government's support for Turkish racism and colonialism. ■

THE LEFT CONFERENCES

SWP: the microwave vanguard

JENNY SUTTON

In a grotesque spectacle of opportunism, 'Marxism '92' saw the SWP moving in to fill the gap opened up by Labour's lunge to the right. Ignorance, prejudice and racist chauvinism were all on display in this oh-so-British pantomime. It was a staged appeal to the more privileged sections of the working class to ditch Labour and turn to the SWP in order to defend their living standards.

RCG members went along for 'a weekend of discussion and debate'. As we found to our cost, debate was the last thing on offer. As a contribution to the current debate in the pages of

Socialist Worker, we produced a leaflet outlining the nature of the Labour Party and its complicit alliance with imperialism. We were banned from distributing it in the building and our comrades were censored, abused and violently evicted. However, this did not prevent us from selling 43 copies of *FRFI* and meeting several people who were disgusted by crude populism posturing as 'Marxism'.

The SWP explain Labour's election defeat by asserting that the Labour Party has moved too far to the right and deserted its traditional constituency. In reality, Labour lost because it failed to regain the votes lost to home-owning, share-holding Thatcherism. Nevertheless Julie Waterson, in her session entitled 'Is

Labour still a working class party?' announced that the SWP wants to be what the Labour Party was in the fifties (racist? reactionary? imperialist? - not far to go!). The SWP want to appeal to that section of the working class whose natural allegiance is to Labour, but who are concerned at Labour's failure to defend the welfare state and the public sector. Chris Bamberg located the SWP's desired constituency when he said: 'People who vote Labour are more important than people who don't vote' (despite Waterson's assertion that Labour did not get the vote of Poll Tax non-payers).

The SWP's contempt for oppressed sections of the working class was further exposed in the session 'Do workers benefit from

Third World exploitation?'. Weyman Bennett gave the example of tea production to illustrate their thesis that workers in the imperialist nations are more exploited than workers in the Third World. He claimed that Indian workers benefit from tea production by being the largest consumers of the stuff, and although they may only get 10p wages from each £1 worth of tea, western workers have to pay inflated prices and, in any case, need this mild drug in order to get to work in the morning. The superior living conditions of workers in the imperialist nations are necessary for the reproduction of labour, and to maintain higher levels of productivity - after all, Bennett claimed, in this day and age 'in order to reproduce a wor-

king class family you need a microwave'.

One of our comrades illustrated the roots of the alliance between imperialism and the labour aristocracy by quoting Cecil Rhodes who, commenting on bread riots in the East End of London in 1895 stated that '... in order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines... If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists.' It is no coincidence that it was two black people who objected to the SWP's position and outlined the obvious privileges enjoyed by western workers. One black woman said 'Look at the equation the other way round; it is clearly ridiculous to argue that workers in the "Third World" benefit from the exploitation of workers in the industrialised nations'.

The corollary to the notion that Western workers are the main victims of imperialist exploitation is the claim that the locus of revolutionary struggle is in the advanced industrialised nations. Revolutionary struggle in the oppressed nations is secondary and inferior in form as well as content. In the session 'Can Castro survive?', the real gains of the Cuban revolution were contemptuously dismissed, and we were told that the Cuban working class lived in conditions as miserable as those in Brazil or Chile.

Through the chauvinist lens of the SWP, the success of the trade union struggles of workers in the imperialist nations accounts for all their relative privileges: these lessons have to be learned by 'Third World' workers. Thus the trade union struggles of Polish counter-revolutionaries were lauded, in contrast to the mass popular movements of the Kurds and the Palestinians, which were dismissed as 'small and not powerful'.

One of the most striking features of the weekend was the opportunistic use of race. Separate sessions on 'race' ensured that the struggle of black people was not located at the forefront of the class struggle, but instead was dealt with as secondary and peripheral to the trade union struggle. The slogan 'Black and White, Unite and Fight' was used as a device to win black workers over to the 'class struggle', the inference being that black people are somehow outside of the working class. Indeed, in Tony Cliff's session 'Class struggle in the '90s', the LA uprising did not warrant a mention.

Throughout the weekend, the only identified obstacle to the development of a revolutionary workers' movement was workers' lack of confidence. The existence of opportunism arising from the superprofits of imperialism was denied outright.

In short, the SWP has made its choice. It has refused to break with Labour and side with the oppressed. It cannot contribute to a new socialist movement founded on anti-imperialism amongst the mass of the working class while it continues to explain away privilege and defend the Labour Party. ■

Ireland: the illusion of talks

SARAH BOND

Does anyone know what they talk about at the peace talks? Since early 1991, British ministers and political parties from the north of Ireland have been meeting, on the pretext of resolving the conflict in the occupied Six Counties. Sinn Fein, representing a third of the Nationalist population, has been excluded. Not surprisingly, nothing has actually been agreed.

The latest round is led by the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Mayhew, and consists of three strands. Strand one is to deal with the administration of the North; strand two with North/South relations, and strand three with relations between Britain and the South, including a replacement for the Anglo-Irish agreement. So far discussion has centred on strand one. However, no agreement has been reached, as the SDLP insist on Dublin's involvement in selecting the North's governing executive, something the Loyalists will not accept.

The Republican movement states that the real agenda for the talks is the strengthening of partition and the maintenance of the Unionist veto. This is illustrated by the contents of two recently-leaked letters from Whitehall: the first was from Mayhew to Unionist leader James Molyneux, reassuring him that further strand one talks would only proceed on the basis of Loyalist proposals; the second was to Washington DC council urging them not to adopt the anti-discriminatory MacBride Principles 'particularly at this sensitive moment when the talks process... has got underway again.'

For the British the talks keep alive the illusion of political movement and offer a carrot to the middle class Catholics of the SDLP who want a share of the privileges enjoyed by the Loyalists. The Nationalist working class meanwhile is left isolated and exposed to Britain's only real 'solution': terror. And if the terror together with the carrot of the talks turns heads amongst sections of the Republican movement, all well and good. So very little happens at the talks, because very little is meant to happen..

Occasionally however a bait is necessary to keep the Loyalists interested. Currently the bait is being provided by the Twenty-Six County state, in the form of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, which contain the Irish Republic's claim to the occupied Six Counties. Promised a £6bn EC loan following the Republic's 'yes' vote to Maastricht, the Fianna Fail government does not want to rock the boat, especially with Britain about to assume the EC presidency. Yet polls suggest 60 per cent of the population in the South opposes dropping the claim. The Republican movement and democratic organisations, north and south, are seeking to galvanise such passive opposition. This activity is part of the real peace process, the building of a force strong enough to stop the talking and the terror which lies behind it, and get Britain out of Ireland. ■



RCP: bespoke tailors of Marxism to the middle class

SARAH BOND & MAXINE WILLIAMS

There is always something faintly repugnant about the sight of middle-aged people trying to stay in with a younger generation by aping them. At the RCP's Prospects for Change conference on 14 June, this sad behaviour took both a physical and a political form. It was hard to decide which was more horrible - 45-year-old men squeezing their expanded waistlines into designer shorts or long-standing RCP members squeezing their Marxism into what passes for politics amongst young middle class people whose humanity appears to have suffered the 'deconstruction' they so endlessly talk about.

Politics, as it must, triumphs. So we will pass in silence over the antics of the ageing fashion plates for whom baldness must be a disaster far surpassing any political defeat. But the uneasiness showed. When a singularly gauche young man said, 'Yeah,

like, I thought, right, like, the age of steam, right, was dead', he provoked the sort of sycophantic laughter with which Janet Street-Porter greets the doings of the 'yoof' on which her career depends.

A clue to what was going on came in a debate between *Living Marxism* editor Mick Hulme and Tony Benn. Benn wiped the floor with him. It was almost embarrassing to hear the Labour Party reformist Tony Benn defend (in his own way) the working class against an organisation called the Revolutionary Communist Party. Hulme argued that the Labour Party had failed because it had not related to new social forces. And what were these forces which hold the key to revolutionary advance in Britain? None other than the 'dynamic' Southern working class, as typified by... Basildon. And, of course, 'yoof'.

Not a word therefore about the thoroughly reactionary, racist character of the Labour Party. Instead we heard that the Labour Party was a 'dinosaur'. The RCP knows its audience. Call some-

thing a 'dinosaur' or 'old' and, well, enough said. (What are they going to do with their older members when they hit 50? One shudders to think.)

Hulme then turned to his Big Idea, the undoubtedly climax of a lifetime struggling at the coalface of 'designer-shorts socialism'. What was it? It was this, comrades: 'New and Far Reaching Problems Require New and Far Reaching Solutions'. That was it. It sounded like the product of one of those terrible and tantalising dreams where you think you have discovered the secret of life only to wake and picture a tadpole.

These solutions do not include the poor, the oppressed working class. The RCP argues that there are currently no progressive forces for change in society, nor will a 'spontaneous movement' arise 'in our era'. First, 'there must be intellectual preconditions' and, praise the Lord, the RCP is here to provide them. 'It is the people in this room,' said Keith Tompson, 'who will form the basis for a

new movement'. According to one speaker from the floor, you mustn't mention the working class because it makes people think of the NHS, 'rubbish nationalised industries' and 'clapped-out public services'. And scorn was poured on the gains of the working class in Sweden where, James Wood told us, 'welfarism means it's a handicap not to be handicapped.'

Why has the RCP been reduced to this? In these hard times for Marxists, it has found a social base for itself amongst the young middle class. Ambitious and determined to secure their place in the sun, yet they are mindful of the coming crisis in the imperialist countries. So they try to ride two horses, hoping to preserve their position whatever the outcome of social events. Today the RCP, tomorrow the BBC.

And the RCP has adapted it-

In the shadow of the Deutschmark

In the context of the now global stagnation of capitalism, European finance capital's attempt to achieve a common currency and central bank by the end of the century threatens to provoke economic and political crises throughout western Europe. TREVOR RAYNE surveys the prospects.

In the February issue of *FRFI* (105), I analysed why British capital had to conform with the process of financial integration outlined in the December Maastricht Treaty. I concluded that finance capital's attempt to impose its monopoly across Europe would exacerbate the effects of uneven development and generate antagonism among the bourgeoisie against the dominant position of German capital.

Major and Lamont are tying their political fates to German capital and the process of financial integration because key sections of British capital can see no alternative. The political editor of the *Financial Times* understands the bitter truth: 'Mr Major is serious in his judgement that a middle-ranking power stranded off the coast of Europe can no longer afford to be a reluctant participant in a game whose rules are constantly adjusted on the other side of the Channel.' Of the Tory dissenters, the *FT* goes on:

'Led by Mrs Margaret Thatcher, they are by and large of the generation which harbours personal memories of the Second World War. It is a generation which has still to come to terms with the economic and political might of a once defeated Germany; one which still looks instinctively to Washington. But the nation's ruling classes - at Westminster, in the City of London and among the captains of industry - see no option but to bind Britain's future to Europe's. As one businessman turned senior minister puts it: "Europe is the future. It is such a pity it has taken us so long to admit it." *Financial Times* 1 July 1992.

Mood change

When 50.7 per cent of Danish voters rejected the Maastricht Treaty it was as if a sudden switch of mood had run across the face of Europe. Apparently half-hidden doubts harboured by sections of its ruling classes erupted into scowling condemnation of the whole integration project. What surfaced was not just their customary reactionary nationalism, but real alarm at the deepening problems gripping capital. For them, while they have no sure solutions, the nation state remains the instrument with which to wage class struggle and hence endure their survival, so instinctively they reach for it.

The Delors Report outlining the route to currency union was presented in 1989. It was born out of a period of growth in Europe, the USA and Japan. Capital was enjoying a feast of profits, not allocating losses. The Soviet Union still provided a focus against which the European bourgeoisie could unite. All this has changed.

Despite reducing the lead interest rate to 3 per cent and allowing the dollar to fall, the US economy saw official unemployment climb from 6.8 per cent to 7.5 per cent over the past year. It will produce at best a paltry 1.6 per cent growth this year. Overhanging the next Presidency are astronomic debts including household debt that exceeds disposable income. This portends the coming 'triple-dip recession'.

In 1991 the economy that financed much US debt and became the biggest overseas exporter of capital in the 1980s turned into a net importer of capital. Japanese industrial output fell 8.7 per cent in May compared with the same month last year. Corporate profits are down 22.5 per cent. Japanese banks are drawing funds in from around the globe to cover their exposure to Tokyo's stock market slump.

Western European unemployment has risen from 8 per cent in 1990 to an estimated 9.3 per cent in 1992. Economic growth was just 1.1 per cent in 1991. The EC trade deficit grew from \$4.7bn in 1990 to \$35.7bn in 1991. Over those same years the German trade surplus fell 70 per cent from \$69.9bn to \$21.3bn. Britain's 1991 trade deficit was \$18bn.

Overall the picture is grim and getting grimmer: capital reveals itself moribund and decaying. At the July Munich Group of Seven summit the USA and Japan wanted economic growth, but are unable to act. Germany and Britain prioritised the fight against inflation. This is the background to the Maastricht dilemma: nothing is working, things are falling apart.

The price of convergence

Maastricht laid down a series of steps towards monetary union and criteria for entrance into the proposed financial system. During 1994 a European Monetary Institute will be established as an embryo Central Bank. Before December 1996, the EC will decide on the date to begin European Monetary Union and who can take part in it. By the end of 1997 the EC will go ahead and create the European Central Bank and the new common currency will begin circulating on 1 January 1999.

A European Central Bank and a single currency invariably require a preceding period of pan-European financial regulation. The Convergence Criteria for EMU are: a) an inflation rate within 1.5 points of the average of the three lowest national rates; b) longer-term interest rates within 2 points of the average rate of the same three countries; c) budget deficits to be no greater than 3 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP: the total value of a nation's output of goods and services minus net income from abroad); d) the ratio of public debt

As unemployment rises and tax revenues fall, budget deficits are rising in almost every EC country

(national debt) to GDP must be no greater than 60 per cent.

These are awesome targets. If adhered to they spell almost complete lack of manoeuvrability of national governments to tackle their worsening problems. When economies are growing the rigours of these criteria appear manageable; when they are stagnant the lack of fit between the criteria and reality looks unbridgeable.

Only Luxembourg and France currently meet all four: France at the expense of being powerless to reduce its 10 per cent unemployment. Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal fail on all four points. Belgium's public debt is over double the 60 per cent ratio; Greece, Ireland and Italy are all around 100 per cent. Germany's public debt is more than 80 per cent of GDP while Britain's is close to 40 per cent. However, the increase in Britain's Public Sector Borrowing Requirement from £30bn in 1992 to a likely £34bn in 1993 will take the budget deficit over 2 per cent beyond the 3 per cent of GDP target. As unemployment rises and tax revenues fall, budget deficits are rising in almost every EC treasury.

To meet the four criteria will require massive cuts in public spending across Europe, privatisation and tax rises to increase state revenues, wages must be held down and the legal position of labour undermined. Into this setting steps the cost of German reunification.

Caught in a trap

'Europe's exchange rate mechanism has become a machine for creating unemployment... If Norman Lamont persists with his obsession to remove inflation no matter what the cost, then he will risk a social explosion.' Victor Keegan, *The Guardian* 13.7.92.

The German economy is the locomotive of EC growth, and the D-Mark is the anchor of EMU. The D-Mark has never been devalued within the Exchange Rate Mechanism and no member country has ever managed to hold its interest rates below those of Germany. Britain joined the ERM primarily to protect sterling from the \$600bn a day foreign currency exchange market with the EC's \$300bn exchange reserves. If British interest rates move out of alignment with German rates money could race out of the City to Frankfurt and sink the core of British capital, along with sterling. A higher inflation rate not accompanied by higher interest rates would have the same effect.

In a 10 July speech, Lamont revealed the plight of British capital: 'The ERM is not an optional extra, an add-on to be jettisoned at the first hint of trouble. It is and will remain at the very centre of our macro-economic strategy' - and what a strategy! He says that if interest rates are cut, dealers will sell pounds off. If the pound is devalued, dealers will sell pounds off. If Britain leaves the ERM, cuts interest rates and floats the pound, dealers will sell pounds off. Every permutation the same result: interest rates will have to be raised. Trapped! The levers of Keynesianism and monetarist economic management evaporated in the \$600bn casino.

Transfer payments within Germany from west to east ran to \$71.6bn last year and will reach \$120bn in 1992. These are increasing the German budget deficit and expanding the money supply at twice the target rate. The Bundesbank relies on interest rates to prevent the costs of reunification including run-away inflation. High German interest rates shove all EC rates up the ladder. This makes the four Criteria



French farmers blockaded roads in protest against EC agricultural subsidy reforms

for Convergence even more violent on national economies.

In Spain, with a budget deficit of 4.4 per cent of GDP, to 'cut costs' the Socialist government is giving hospitals 'greater self-management'. There are plans to privatise and close state industries. Labour law is being reformed and, along with cuts in benefits, savings of nearly £1bn are expected. This provoked a one-day general strike at the end of May.

The ultimate instruments of capitalist economic policy will be unmasks as the truncheon and the gun

In Italy, the socialist government announced an emergency austerity budget in July. To cut the public sector deficit from an expected 11 per cent of GDP and public debt from 105 per cent, new taxes will garner an average £55 more per household per month. These are cuts in defence expenditure, grants to local authorities and on public sector employment. A privatisation programme will be introduced and people will be given incentives not to retire until 65. For Italy, the financial convergence process will increase the division between north and south.

Across Europe the four Criteria now appear in explosive contradiction: the attempt to hold down inflation combined with the need to keep exchange rates in close tandem is generating unemployment and social needs that necessitate an expansion of state spending and borrowing if social upheavals are not to be risked. The ultimate instruments of capitalist economic policy will be unmasks as the truncheon and the gun.

Twin-track Europe

In periods of stagnation, finance capital accelerates its tendency towards concentration and monopoly. Immediately

following the Danish referendum, money fled out of the Italian, Spanish and Portuguese stock markets and into those of Germany, the Netherlands and France. At the same time speculators sold off other currencies and bought into D-marks. Europe is once again a more surely than ever before twin-track and two-speed with a core - Germany, Netherlands and France - and a periphery - Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland. Italy fears being left out of the core around which monetary union will form. John Major is under instruction to make sure that the City loses nothing to the core and if that means being part of it - so be it!

Gone are the dreams of a pan-European Keynesianism. The EC budget, meagre 2 per cent of the EC GDP, will be an arena for dogged wrangling. Increases in the EC Cohesion and Regional funds, just 0.7 per cent of EC GDP, for improving the infrastructure of the poorest members, were rejected out of hand at June's Lisbon EC summit by Germany, Britain and the Netherlands.

Gone too is the conception of an Europe balanced by four roughly equal powers - France, Germany, Britain and Italy co-operating to shape a European union. In its place is a Germany demanding 100 seats in the European Parliament, upsetting the status quo of 8 each for the big four. A Germany wondering why it should buy expensive food from western Europe when cheaper food is available to the east. Why should it subsidise the Mediterranean states and Ireland when the east becomes kinks, threatening it with millions of refugees? There is a price to be extracted and capital can but extract it. The President of the Bundesbank considers ecu a meaningless word; what about Euro mark? he wonders out loud - and the Central Bank? Bonn or Frankfurt, of course. Germany will seek to vet who joins EMU and who does not.

Now within Western Europe a re-power struggle between the national bourgeoisie will begin. Beneath a shifting array of alliances and disputes the only certainty is that the bill will be presented to the working class. ■

CAMPAIGNING WITH CITY AA

★ On 29 June, the national day of mourning for those murdered at Boipatong was marked in Britain, City AA-style, by an occupation of the racist South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square.

A contingent of City AA activists, including RCG members, marched into the Embassy and demanded to see the Ambassador and for the Embassy to be closed in respect for the dead. Told that the Ambassador was absent, we proceeded to close the Embassy down ourselves, chaining the gates shut from inside and holding a demonstration inside the building, with placards bearing the names of the dead. The supportive crowd that gathered outside was dispersed by the police who, acting as ever as henchmen of the racist embassy, moved in to arrest the peaceful demonstrators. But apartheid ambassador Kent Durr, deciding perhaps he wasn't absent after all, chose to make an appearance at this point and hypocritically expressed his 'sympathy' for the families of those murdered by the apartheid regime. We were ejected - and the Embassy was closed down till the afternoon.



★ The occupation of the Embassy marks just the beginning of City AA's Emergency Campaign for Majority Rule, which has also involved pickets of the South African Airways at Oxford Circus, a rally to commemorate Boipatong jointly called with the PAC and supported by a group from SACOS; the publication of a new broadsheet on the violence that exposes the murderous role of the apartheid regime; and a dramatic escalation of the sports boycott. A picket of GoldFields, the British company which provides a base for Koevoet death squads, is planned, as well as an offensive on the consumer boycott. Our regular weekend pickets of the racist embassy are becoming a focal point for attracting new activists.

★ The renewed anger and militancy of black people in South Africa in the wake of the Boipatong massacre demands a response out on the streets of Britain, and in particular outside the South African Embassy, the most telling symbol of British imperialism's continued support for the apartheid regime. The fact that the AAM, leading a short and hastily organised march through Trafalgar Square, did not even pause as it passed the South African Embassy, finishing up in a back street where the passing traffic drowned out the words of Walter Sisulu and Trevor Huddleston, shows that they are no more capable than they ever were of meeting that challenge.

★ Sectarian to the last, the AAM attempted to exclude City AA from a 'hearing' called under the aegis of the UN Special Committee on Apartheid, to discuss the violence. The direct intervention of the UN ensured that City AA delegates were admitted. No representatives of the BCMA/AZAPO were invited.

★ Those anti-apartheid activists who want do more than write an occasional letter to their MPs in response to the atrocities of the apartheid regime, and want to give active solidarity to all those in Azania/South Africa who are continuing the struggle for majority rule should phone 071 837 6050 for details of City AA's Emergency Campaign for Majority Rule.

Copies of City AA's Broadsheet on the violence, 50p + 25p p&p are available from City AA, BM City AA, London WC1N 3XX.

'The majority of the people on the ground never understood negotiations. People think "These guys are talking and we are getting killed". It was only when we went around the townships that we began to feel we have moved too fast ahead of the people.'

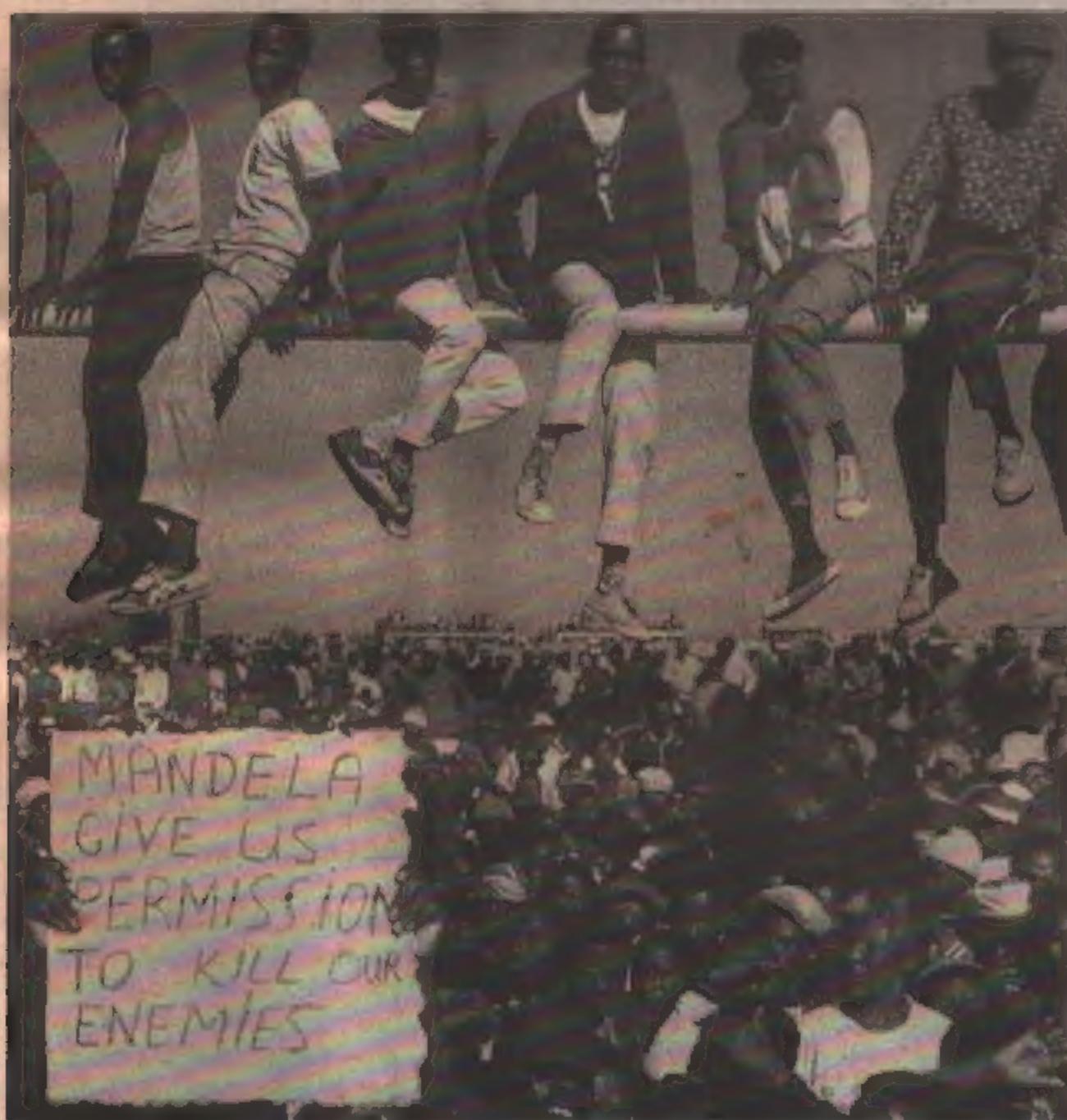
demands delivered to the regime, and both Steve Tshwete, the ANC Executive member who has led the lifting of the sports boycott, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu called for renewal of the sports boycott and the banning of South Africa from the Olympic Games. This hardline stand did not last long. Cyril Ramaphosa, ANC Secretary General, announced the breakdown of talks but said this would be reviewed if the government acted decisively to meet the 14 demands. Mandela later clarified that talks would resume if some of the most important demands were met. The aftermath of the massacre had become part of the bargaining process, although arguably more public in character than the Codesa negotiations or the ANC's private talks.

Soon after, the ANC announced that the sporting programmes already arranged could go ahead provided that sportspeople wear stickers or armbands proclaiming 'peace and democracy' and touring teams visit Boipatong to express their condolences. Nothing has been said about what will happen if teams breach these requirements. Since the

The majority of the people on the ground never understood negotiations. People think "These guys are talking and we're getting killed". It was only when we went around [the townships] that we began to feel we have moved too fast ahead of the people'.

Most of the ANC leadership have moved out of the townships into the wealthy formerly all-white suburbs, and are now arguably not ahead but very much lagging behind the consciousness of the masses. But Hani is aware of the ANC's fundamental problem: 'If we had not called a stop to negotiations, the net result would have been growing disaffection and even alienation.' Without mass support the ANC will be unable to negotiate credibly with the regime; but with mass support the ANC is subject to the pressures of a majority who have seen their economic and social conditions dramatically worsen since negotiations began.

Few doubt that the ANC's current militant posture is designed to put Codesa back on the rails: 'Their followers are losing patience [but] at the end of the day their options are



regime has pursued its genocidal activities over the last two years under the slogan of 'peace and democracy', the regime's agreement to the conditions is a mere hypocritical cover up. Whose peace? and Whose democracy? In reality the ANC had climbed down.

In South Africa, as in the imperialist nations, the Olympics is big money-making business. All but 11 of the South African team at Barcelona will be white, and 'disadvantaged athletes' will be consigned to the stands to watch their more-privileged compatriots contest for medals. The ANC's announcement also ruled out future international sports exchanges 'until the road to peace and democracy is firmly established', but on 16 July, Australia announced it would play Test cricket against South Africa in 1993.

Grassroots pressure

Whether the mass action campaign will be diverted is an open question. It is clear that the ANC will not meet its supporters' demands for guns and arms to fight back against their attackers. Chris Hani, SACP General Secretary and ANC Executive member, highlighted the divergence between the ANC leadership and its mass support when he admitted:

'The ANC and the regime have reached an agreement based on the following assumptions:

—that the oppressed is the guilty party and has to make the major concessions for a solution.



—that the oppressed suspend their right to revolt in favour of hand-out liberty.

—that the process of change remains firmly in the hands of white people with the African majority hopeful spectators...

Neither the ANC nor the regime has any prerogative to decide or prescribe the method used by broad liberation movements to achieve freedom from oppression. They can bind themselves only. The PAC remains committed to all forms of struggle. In the absence of the ballot, the bullet cannot be abandoned and we remain committed to an intensification of the armed struggle. The demand for a Constituent Assembly does open the way for a democratic resolution, but this option has been rejected out of hand by the regime...

It is now in our view necessary for the ANC to review its entire strategy for participating in an All-Party Congress [Codesa] which is clearly designed to sidetrack the people's democratic demand for an elected constituent assembly. We remain committed to exploring the possibilities of a United Front with the ANC and other liberation movements.'

The PAC has maintained its position, but despite repeated calls that the ANC should join them in a Patriotic Front to challenge the regime, the ANC has preferred to pursue Codesa talks with a weakening position at the negotiating table. At a meeting in London on 17 July Benny Alexander, responding to calls for the PAC to end the armed struggle and join negotiations, stated: 'You negotiate to end the war; you do not end the war to negotiate'.

The ANC is now under pressure from both sides. At the UN Security Council the imperialists exerted pressure to reopen the talks as the best means of defending their stake in South Africa. It is reported that the Russian delegation, under instruction from Yeltsin, insisted on the call to revive negotiations. But anger in the townships will not be easily assuaged. As George Jackson said, they will be slow to anger but they will rage undammed. The PAC and AZAPO have promised that they will lead a struggle to free their people and overthrow apartheid. The black majority knows that the Codesa negotiations do not lead in that direction.

HOWZAT!

On 19 July, the Transvaal cricket team played MCC at Lord's. It was the first time for 27 years. Ex-pat South Africans turned up with champagne and hampers to be greeted by Denis Compton, doyen of English cricket. Fortunately for opponents of apartheid, City of London Anti-Apartheid Group held a protest outside the gates much to Compton's chagrin. The dignified facade dropped like a brick - 'Piss off!' cried Compton. Within minutes of the start of the match eight members of City AA ran onto the pitch and lifted the stumps despite increased security and police because City AA had promised to disrupt the match. Seven City AA members were held at Paddington Green for nine hours 'for their own protection'. The police apparently believe that racist South Africans have a history of beating up their opponents! Well! Well!

City AA and FRC activists were not fooled, and disrupted her races all over the country every year she attempted to run, notably at Crystal Palace in 1984 and Gateshead in 1986. That her British citizenship was only ever a flag of convenience was evinced when Budd participated in a race in South Africa, while a 'British' citizen and, when a row erupted, fled back to South Africa. Her attempt to run overtly for the apartheid regime which she has never spoken out against, with or without a peace badge, was met with the welcome it deserves.

ISOLATE APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Stopping apartheid in its tracks

In the wake of the Boipatong massacre, CAT WIENER argues that the sporting isolation of South Africa is more necessary than ever before.

On 10 July City of London Anti-Apartheid Group disrupted the 2,000m women's race at Crystal Palace where Zola (Budd) Pieterse was making her comeback to Britain. Despite increased security including a large police presence (some of whom were disguised as stewards) in response to advance publicity and warnings, 12 City AA activists, including RCG members, wearing T-shirts proclaiming 'No normal sport in an abnormal society' and carrying a banner that read 'Remember Boipatong! Isolate apartheid!' ran on to the track. Zola Budd dropped out shortly afterwards. City AA and FRC also organised a protest outside the grounds. The protest was held with the full support of the PAC, AZAPO, South African Council on Sport and the South African Amateur Athletics Board, and received wide publicity in Britain and South Africa.

As the horror of the massacre at Boipatong reverberated around the world, Archbishop Desmond Tutu issued a call for South Africa to be banned once again from participating in the Olympic Games at Barcelona this year. Yet within days, the ANC leadership, which had initially refused to be drawn on the question of the sports boycott, announced that fixtures that had already been arranged could go ahead as long as participating sportspeople visited the scene of the Boipatong massacre, and wore armbands bearing a 'peace and democracy' logo.

City AA supports the view that to allow South Africa, in which black people have less opportunity than ever to compete with white South Africans on an equal footing, to participate in international sport is to legitimise apartheid. The wearing of 'peace and democracy' badges is a hypocrisy which covers up the duplicity of an intransigent and racist government which talks of peace while waging a remorseless war. We are therefore intensifying the sports boycott, which we have always campaigned actively to impose, in spite of the ruses resorted to by the likes of Zola Budd.

In 1984 Daily Mail editor Sir David English used his influence to obtain a British passport for Zola Budd in a record 10 days - while black families may wait for months or years to obtain British citizenship. The media then spent the next four years trying to convince the world that Budd was running for Britain not apartheid. In 1985 her South African coach made it clear: 'She may now be a British athlete, but the world knows her as South African. Zola has given this country the best publicity possible.'

City AA and FRC activists were not fooled, and disrupted her races all over the country every year she attempted to run, notably at Crystal Palace in 1984 and Gateshead in 1986. That her British citizenship was only ever a flag of convenience was evinced when Budd participated in a race in South Africa, while a 'British' citizen and, when a row erupted, fled back to South Africa. Her attempt to run overtly for the apartheid regime which she has never spoken out against, with or without a peace badge, was met with the welcome it deserves.

City AA also campaigned actively



City AA on the track at Crystal Palace

protest against her.

When black Commonwealth countries called for a boycott of the Edinburgh Commonwealth games in opposition to Thatcher's stance on sanctions, also in 1986, AAM Chair Bob Hughes co-signed an open letter published in *The Scotsman* from the Scottish Trade Union Council opposing the boycott because it was not in the interests of the Scottish people.

And the only campaign it does claim as part of its history, the superbly successful Stop the Seventies Tour, was in fact organised in spite of, and most certainly not because of, the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Peter Hain, one of the founding members of STST but now a Labour MP, wrote of '...a great deal of pressure exerted by some people in the Anti-Apartheid Movement on Dennis Brutus and Hugh Geach (co-founders of the STST) to try to get them to scrap the idea of the co-ordinating committee.'

Yet the model of the STST, which organised large militant demonstrations against the 1970 Springbok tour pickets, organised disruption of matches, sit-down occupations and even sabotage of pitches (in January 1970 on one night 14 cricket grounds were raided simultaneously) is precisely the kind of movement that is needed today.

When the ANC supported the re-admission of South Africa into Olympic sport after 30 years of isolation, and sent its delegate Steve Tshwete to argue for the South African United Cricket Board to be re-admitted into the International Cricket Council only a year ago, it thought it would be able to control the process of sanctions-lifting to exert leverage against the National Party in its negotiations. In practice, the opening of the floodgates gave a green light to de Clerk to press ahead with his own agenda.

Economic and social conditions for black people in South Africa have worsened. Today, in the aftermath of Boipatong, few of them expect any progress from negotiations. To uphold and intensify the sports boycott as part of an overall campaign for the isolation of South Africa is perhaps today a more pressing task than at any time in the past.

...this is Brazil

★ Last year Brazil paid out in interest approximately \$16 billion on its over \$113 billion foreign debt – the Third World's highest.

★ In this, the world's ninth largest economy and second biggest food exporter, two thirds of the population are undernourished.

★ Twenty years ago 70 per cent of the population lived in rural areas. Today, 70 per cent live in the cities.

★ São Paulo is home to 17 million people. Each day it receives another 2,000 migrants from the countryside.

★ São Paulo houses Shell, Esso, Volkswagen, General Electric and many of the world's other leading multinationals. It is a city with 30 per cent unemployment, where real wages have fallen by 30 per cent in two years and where the minimum wage is equivalent of about one-fifteenth of a low paid manual worker in Britain.

★ The richest one per cent of Brazil's population receives more income than the poorest 50 per cent.

★ 'In Rio every month about 100 children under 3 years old are abandoned in the streets or in the hospitals. In Acre (an Amazon state) impoverished mothers sell their young daughters to lorry drivers and gold prospectors as prostitutes. In São Paulo there are 1,200 gangs of child criminals and between them they have 100,000 firearms.'

(Report from the Roman Catholic Bishops of Brazil).

★ In the first four months of 1992, 167 people under the age of 18 were killed in Rio. Around the world it has become known as 'the war on the children'. Each night, on average, a further 12 people are killed by police and death squads in Rio and São Paulo.

★ Beneath Rio's outstretched arms of Christ is the spectacular Guanabara Bay. Into it, every day, are poured 470 tonnes of raw sewage, 5,500 tonnes of rubbish, 70 tonnes of industrial effluents and 9 tonnes of oil.

★ Tuberculosis has reached epidemic proportions; cholera has returned.

★ President Collor is threatened with impeachment as his closest aides are implicated in bribery and corruption worth millions of dollars. They call it 'parallel government', where ministers demand 30 per cent kickbacks for issuing contracts to supply, for example, the Health Ministry.

★ In Brazil, 25 million children live in abject poverty; 8 million are on the streets. Diarrhoea is the biggest killer of children under two.

★ More people have access to television than to clean water. ★ During Bush's and Major's visit to Rio tens of thousands of workers and slum dwellers took to the streets demanding an end to their misery.

Trevor Rayne



'Nature has been humiliated and subordinated to the accumulation of capital. Land, water and air are being poisoned so that money will generate more money without a drop in the rate of profit.' – Eduardo Galleano.

Rio Earth Summit capital against the world

A creative scientist might one day estimate the damage done to the world's greenhouse gas problem by the Earth Summit. After all, this gathering of thousands of bureaucrats, bankers, businessmen and politicians produced sufficient quantities of hot air to rival General Motors. And that is about all it did produce. The deadly hand of capital strangled any genuine attempts to deal with the environmental catastrophe facing humanity.

The scale of this catastrophe is not a matter for debate. World energy use has grown 20 per cent in the last 15 years, the rise in carbon emissions is leading to a warming of climate, the forests which might ameliorate this are being chopped down at the rate of 17 million hectares a year, six million of which become deserts. There is a huge and growing hole in the ozone layer which protects the earth from lethal ultra-violet rays. The air, land and sea are being poisoned by toxic emissions and dumping. Soil erosion, caused by over-intensive farming, is affecting billions of acres a year and creating new deserts. It is estimated that 250,000 species, one quarter of the earth's total biological diversity, are in danger of becoming extinct over the next 20 to 30 years.

The causes and possible cures for these problems are, however, a matter of intense debate. By far the strongest lobby is that of capital – the multinationals and the imperialist governments which represent them. Their concern is not the future of the earth or of humanity but profit. They are aware of the growing worries of people throughout the world, particularly those who have to live amongst the filth created by the 'free market', about the future of earth and humanity. When the anonymous US delegate said that 'environment protection has replaced communism as the great threat to capitalism', he was articulating the fears of the capitalist class. And just as they mobilised to destroy communism, so too are they fighting tooth and nail against all

serious efforts to solve environmental problems. The awesome power that they bring to bear in this enterprise was vividly shown at the Rio Summit.

Profits first and last

The US, with the crudity of a superpower threatened by rivals (and the vulgarity of a President playing to the US electoral gallery), bluntly said that it would sign nothing that threatened its economic competitiveness. As John Vidal said in *The Guardian*:

'The US delegation, under orders from Bush, has been systematically going through the agenda adding phrases like "where possible" and "if appropriate" to all paragraphs that demand any commitment by government to change their national policies or the life-style of their people.'

In fact it was rather handy for the other imperialist governments that the US should so readily assume the devil's mantle at Rio. In comparison, the British, Japanese and Europeans managed to sound quite concerned about matters environmental. In reality, their actions were quite as bad as those of the US.

Britain, in line with John Major's argument that 'we have not destroyed the world out of greed but out of ignorance', seemed keen to perpetuate that ignorance and led the move to drop all references to the environmental responsibilities of multinational corporations. The EC and Japan challenged the right of developing nations to restrict access to their timber resources. The EC tried to stop limits on overfishing. The US refused point blank to sign the Treaty on Biodiversity, arguing that the protection it offered to flora and fauna would interfere with the burgeoning

biotechnology industry's right to patent life forms.

Words are cheap

Each imperialist government was out to protect its own industries and to evade responsibility for environmental degradation. The end result was that even those agreements and treaties passed, whilst full of windy declarations, were toothless. They include:

- The treaty on climate change was originally to have limited greenhouse gas emissions to their 1990 level by the year 2000. Given that it is the 1990 levels which have done the damage, this was hardly a radical proposal. But it was too much for the gigantic car and oil lobbies. The treaty now obliges signatories to come up with proposals to limit emissions.

- There was no Treaty on Forest Protection. Instead a non-binding 'declaration of principles' was agreed which was quickly denounced by environmentalists as 'a Chainsaw Charter'.

- The Biodiversity Treaty was agreed (without US signature). Originally supposed to be about the protection of plant and animal life, it contains provisions to compensate nations whose resources are exploited and destroyed. It is unclear how or if this could be enforced.

- Agenda 21 – a non-binding declaration about environmental issues.

That this is the final result of a year-long process of growing environmental concern can only be seen as a victory for the multinationals and the imperialist governments. They avoided any binding commitments that might interfere with the hallowed pursuit of profit. No cuts in pollution of the air, no halt to toxic waste dumping, no restrictions on the biotechnology industry, no change in

the unfair trade terms and debt repayments that force environmental destruction onto the oppressed nations. Above all, nothing that would cost big business a penny.

Who are the polluters?

By what seems an almost miraculous process, much of the debate about environmental problems seems to focus on the poor nations. Thus for example, the US was very anxious at Rio to talk about forestry. This is presumably because most of the remaining forest areas are in poor nations, the rich ones having chopped their own down years ago. Likewise they are keen (aside from the Vatican lobby) to talk about population growth, much of which is taking place in poor nations.

Yet the reality is that whilst they comprise only 25 per cent of the world's population, the rich countries use 80 per cent of its energy and consume 70 per cent of its fossil fuel. They have 86 per cent of its industry and 90 per cent of its cars. They produce 60 per cent of the world's industrial wastes and 90 per cent of its most dangerous wastes. Given that even the rich nations have substantial poor classes, these figures mean that the better-off sections of the richer nations have a lifestyle of a grotesquely destructive character. It is absolutely clear that if the whole of the world's population lived in such a style, the earth would last for only a few more generations. However, we are not simply talking about consumption, although frankly it is time that the left started talking more about a profligate way of life that destroys resources, generates poverty in poor nations and erodes the humanity of those that live in the rich nations. We must however focus on the system that has produced such a culture.

The capitalist multinationals that have turned the populations of rich nations into consumer zombies are as powerful as governments, often more

Castro at Rio: Tomorrow will be too late

Fidel Castro's address to the Rio Summit exposed sharply the hypocrisy of the imperialist nations who blame environmental destruction on the underdeveloped countries while they themselves continue to plunder and devastate the planet in their insatiable drive for profits. He received thunderous applause from delegates from Latin America.

An important biological species is in danger of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive liquidation of its natural conditions for survival: humankind. We are now becoming aware of this problem when it is almost too late to prevent it.

It is necessary to point out that the consumer societies are those fundamentally responsible for the atrocious destruction of the environment. They arose from the former colonial metropoli and the imperialist policies which in turn engendered the backwardness and poverty that today scourge the immense majority of humanity. With only 20 per cent of the world population, they consume two-thirds of the metals and three-quarters of the energy the earth produces. They have poisoned the rivers and the seas, they have polluted the

air, they have weakened and perforated the ozone layer, they have saturated the atmosphere with gases that alter climatic conditions with catastrophic effects that we are already beginning to suffer.

The forests are disappearing, the deserts are gaining ground, billions of tons of fertile soil are washed into the sea every year, numerous species are being extinguished, overpopulation and poverty lead to desperate attempts to survive, even at the cost of sacrificing lives.

It is impossible to blame the countries of the Third World, formerly colonies and now nations that are exploited and sacked by an unjust world economic order.

The solution cannot be to prevent the development of those who most need it. The truth is that anything that contributes to underdevelopment

and poverty today constitutes a flagrant violation of ecology. Tens of millions of men, women and children die every year in the Third World because of this, more than in each of the two world wars. Unequal terms of trade, protectionism and the external debt attack the ecology and promote the destruction of the environment.

If we want to save humanity from self-destruction, there must be a better distribution of the planet's available wealth and technology. Less luxury and waste in a few countries so that there will be less poverty and hunger in the greater part of the earth. No more transference to the Third World of lifestyles and consumer habits that ruin the environment. Human life must be made more rational. A just international economic order must be applied. All necessary

science must be used for sustained development without pollution. We must pay our ecological debt, not the foreign debt. Hunger must disappear, not humankind.

Now that the supposed threats of communism have disappeared, and there are no longer pretexts for cold wars, arms races and military spending, what is keeping us from immediately devoting these resources to promoting the development of the Third World and combating the threat of ecological destruction facing the planet?

Let selfishness cease.

Let hegemonic tendencies cease.

Let insensitivity, irresponsibility and deception cease.

Tomorrow will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago.

Granma International 21 June 1992



so. The world's largest 500 companies now control 70% of world trade, 80% of foreign investment and 30% of world gross domestic product. These companies produce 50% of greenhouse gases in the six largest industrial sectors which account for 80% of the total problem. When threatened with controls in the richer nations (who, working on the Not In My Back Yard principle, prefer to control domestic pollution if possible), they move to countries too poor to quibble about pollution. Thus when California (where the richest US citizens live) introduced clean air legislation, the furniture industry moved lock, stock and barrel to Mexico. Dutch industrialists threatened to do the same if legislation was introduced in Holland, which has a strong environmental lobby. In the US, the Council on Competitiveness, chaired by Vice President Dan Quayle, has lobbied against any environmental protection on the grounds that it interferes with profits and recently has campaigned for the US industries to be allowed to 'buy' the right to pollute the environment.

The imperialist governments, which represent the polluters' interests, set the terms of trade for poor nations. Thus, whilst they bleat about deforestation, they put no tariffs on the import of raw timber but do put a tariff on manufactured wood goods from poor nations, thus forcing the latter to cut down even more forests. It is the imperialist banks which in the 1970s induced poor nations to acquire debts of a magnitude that is breathtaking. Sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest region on the globe, afflicted by famine and war (fought with guns sold to them by Western firms) sends \$1 billion every month to Western banks in interest payments. Latin America, with its huge proportion of absolutely poor people, sends \$4 billion. And what did they get for their money? That which was not stolen by corrupt and compliant local governments was spent on costly and environmentally disastrous projects such as dams that displaced hundreds of thousands of people. To repay these debts poor nations are forced to turn away from growing their own food to growing cash crops for rich Western consumers. Burning down forests to provide grazing for cattle which will become Big Macs is but one example.

These multinational polluters are the engines of a system that enforces starvation in the poor nations. More than half the developing countries cannot feed themselves. 14 million children die every year from malnutrition and six million from diarrhoea. The poverty of these nations and the environmental degradations which it breeds, are the preconditions for the wealth of the multinationals and imperialist banks. They set the terms for world trade which ensure that in the last ten years the prices of raw materials on which poor nations are dependent have fallen 20 per cent. One firm alone accounts for 30 per cent of cereals traded in world markets. Seven firms, amongst them British Unilever, set the price at which poor nations are forced to sell coffee and control the export, processing and marketing of it. The big money is not made by those who do the back breaking work of growing

and picking the coffee but by the firms turning it into the undrinkable instant trash that has ruined many a Western stomach. Just as it is not the forest dwellers of Brazil who benefit from the new drugs being discovered in the forests, but the big drug companies who steal them, manufacture their chemical equivalent and bleed the NHS dry by inflating its price many hundreds of times.

The rapidly expanding biotechnology industry, which the US was so keen to protect at Rio, will make things even worse. Its aim is to plunder the genetic resources of the poor nations in order to create new forms of life, for the purposes of making huge profits. With genetic engineering, the multinationals can create and patent new seed strains and plants which will outdo all competitors. Poor farmers who cannot afford them will go under. In June alone ICI announced a new form of wheat (which will of course 'relieve food

'And just as they mobilised to destroy communism, so too are they fighting tooth and nail against all serious efforts to solve environmental problems'

shortages') and a new tomato with which it hopes to capture the tomato paste market. Interestingly, this market is worth over \$4 billion a year, double the budget which Rio gave to the much-vaunted Global Environmental Facility, which is supposed to begin to tackle environmental problems. This gives us a neat and memorable tabulation of the multinationals' sense of priorities: tomato puree-2; earth's survival-1.

Only socialism can save the planet

The poor nations at Rio attempted repeatedly to put across the message that none of the problems of the environment could be divorced from the issues of poverty and development. Indeed their situation is growing worse as the imperialist agencies, such as the World Bank, run rampant in their economies, enforcing cuts in already small public spending, preventing the protection of their industries and agriculture, enforcing debt repayment. They made it clear that they could not afford environmental protection and often lack the technology which would allow it. The rich nations turned deaf ear.

What do they care if millions of children die every year, as long as the balance sheet is healthy. What do they care if the world is a filthy cesspit? They don't have to live in its worst filth. And what do they care if the earth becomes incapable of sustaining life? They won't be around to see it. If capital took human form it would be a greedy, gluttonous, selfish, murderous and primitive being. Marx wrote that capital profanes all that is sacred. Could even he have predicted the extent of its profanity?

Yet we must not be overwhelmed by the pessimism and hopelessness which occasionally seem to afflict the environmental movement. The left can and must begin systematically to take up these issues and point the finger of blame at those responsible - the multinationals, the imperialists. It is only socialists who have argued for a planned use of resources, international co-operation and the liberation of the poor and oppressed. All of these, which have been on our banner for 150 years, are the preconditions for the solution to the environmental catastrophe facing the world. If capitalists see environmental protection as such a threat, it is time socialists started to push our message home: only socialism can save the planet. Maxine Williams

The Rio Summit set up a fund for environmental purposes, the Global Environmental Facility. This will be under the control of the World Bank and the UN. The World Bank's record on environmental matters is disastrous. One of its projects in Rondonia, Brazil, helped to destroy, on the Bank's own admission, 17% of the state's rain forest. It has now allocated a £122 million loan to a further project in the area. It is estimated that only 2% of this will reach the local people. 52,000 Amazonian Indian families are at risk from the effects of this project which, it is feared, will further damage the environment, encourage large business interests and farmers and force indebtedness upon the local population.

Tomato puree versus the world's survival

In the field of agriculture, the effects are most devastating both for the environment and for people. The Green Revolution of the 1970s was going to solve the problem of world hunger. It made it worse. Aid was given to the

Unlike Trotskyism, most of these trends regarded the collapse of the USSR as a major defeat for the international working class. In their discussions a particular concern has been to trace the counter-revolution back to Khrushchev's leadership following Stalin's death in 1953. Khrushchev's attack on Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956, they argue, initiated the reactionary process which led to 1991. In this context they defend Stalin's record in opposition to that of Khrushchev's and his successors'.

Perestroika and Glasnost

Harpal Brar rightly argues that glasnost and perestroika was an 'unmitigated disaster for the cause of socialism'. Similarly Ludo Martens claims that Gorbachev's programme encouraged 'the restoration of private ownership and the capitalist yoke'. Both attach particular importance to Glasnost - so-called 'democratisation' - which passed control of the media and public political life to the 'reforming intelligentsia' who 'have little in common with the Soviet working class and should therefore be characterised as neo-bourgeois' (Brar). Glasnost allowed the media to 'propagate pre-1917 upper class ideals' (Martens) and was vital for the counter-revolution. For, 'without creating public opinion and rousing public sentiment against the planned socialist economy' Gorbachev's plans to restore the market could not have succeeded. (Brar)

Gorbachev, whose singular achievement was the destruction of the CPSU, was a plaything of this 'neo-bourgeoisie' who sang whatever tune was necessary to their advance. Both Brar and Ludens expose his reactionary ideology. His espousal of 'universal human values' and his concern for 'the problem of human survival' were but code words for his surrender to imperialism. With Gorbachev's:

'pursuit of a world of co-operation - between imperialism and socialism, between exploiters and exploited, between the oppressors and the oppressed - all the real contradictions of the contemporary world are swept under the rug. (Brar p6)

The social roots of the counter-revolution in the USSR

Most Maoists, uncritically defending Stalin's record, refuse to recognise that the social and class basis for counter-revolution developed during the period of Stalin's leadership. At most they admit the existence of revisionism but then fail to relate it to its material base. Writing about the origins of Gorbachev's counter-revolution Harpal Brar states:

'The rot, the downhill process along the road leading to the restoration of capitalism, started with the triumph of Khrushchevite revisionism at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, and the distortions of Marxism-Leninism in its aftermath and its direct stimulus in the fields of philosophy, political economy and the class struggle.'

In tandem Ludo Martens argues that:

'The process of degeneration, started in 1956, needed three decades to finish off socialism.'

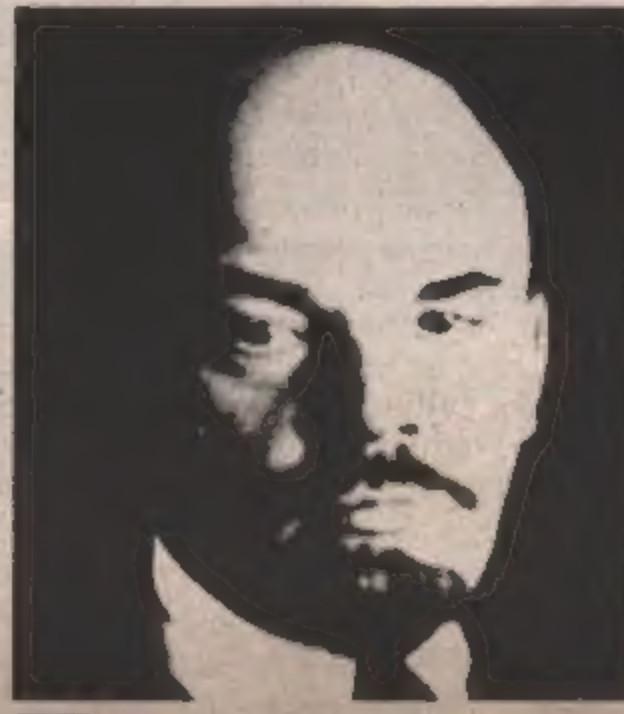
There is of course some validity in tracing Gorbachev's standpoint to that of Khrushchev's. There was a close resemblance in their ideological outlook and economic and political programmes. But if Khrushchev was Gorbachev's predecessor who then was Khrushchev's? How did the revisionist Khrushchev so easily capture the once proud Bolshevik Party?

An answer is suggested in an extract that Ludens, more critical of the Stalin period than Brar, offers from Mao Zedong:

'Before Khrushchev's coming to power, the activities of the new

The origins of Gorbachev's counter-revolution

In the past period a number of books have been published on the 1991 counter-revolution in the USSR. Among them are Perestroika: the complete collapse of Revisionism by Harpal Brar of the Indian Workers Association and The Velvet Counter Revolution by Ludo Martens of the Belgian Party of Labour. Despite their many divergent views, they allow us to discuss the positions of trends in the communist movement influenced by the Chinese Communist Party and legacy of Mao Zedong. EDDIE ABRAHAMS analyses their positions and raises some preliminary questions about Stalin and Stalinism.



Stalin



Stalin



Khrushchev

bourgeois elements were limited and sanctioned. But since Khrushchev has seized power... these new bourgeois elements have attained dominant positions within the party and the state... (emphasis added)

In other words Khrushchev's triumph was founded on neo-bourgeois social forces which developed during Stalin's leadership between 1926 and 1953. Khrushchev's victory was politically decisive in easing their way to dominance in the party. Brar, albeit involuntarily, acknowledges this reality. He notes that in his last years Stalin was forced to conduct a bitter debate against Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's ideological precursors many of whom occupied top industrial and party posts. This stratum represented by economists such as Yaroshenko, Notkin, Sanina, Vensher and others was essentially Fabian and bureaucratic. They reduced the problem of the planned economy to a technical question:

'of the rational organisation of the productive forces in social production (and to a) scientific demonstration of the validity of such organisation.'

Having gained enormous influence in the party, they were not about to allow class, social and political questions affecting the working class to interfere with their running of economy. From a Marxist point of view a decisive feature of the Stalin period was not only the CPSU's failure to uproot bourgeois restorationist trends but also the latter's rise to prominence within the Party and society.

The roots of this process must be traced to the international isolation of the Russian Revolution. The Civil War, imperialist intervention and defeat of the post-1918 European revolutions decimated and exhausted the Soviet working class. It had to begin the task of building socialism in an economically devastated country dominated by a massive and backward peasantry. In 1920 industrial output was only 13% of its pre-war level, and agricultural output 50%. The population of Petrograd and Moscow - main working class centres - dropped by 57.5% and 44.5% respectively. Meanwhile the anti-communist kulaks - rich peasants -



Mikhail Gorbachev, ex-President of the ex-USSR, once proclaimed himself a Marxist and still claims to be a socialist. Today he is acting as a paid agent of imperialism and Zionism. On a recent visit to Israel he said of Zionist settlements being built on Arab land 'I understand the reason for these communities created by Israel.' As payment Judas Gorbachev received \$19,000. They say every man has his price. And Gorbachev's price is in dollars. ■

and urban merchants were growing in strength and confidence. The Bolshevik Party, with its most advanced cadre dead, was flooded with self-seeking careerists, ex-Mensheviks and bourgeois hacks. Thus began a process of degeneration and bureaucratisation of the critical instrument of working class, socialist power.

The dictatorship of the proletariat and the Stalin Question

Such an analysis allows us to place the most controversial issues of the Stalin period - industrialisation and collectivisation (1928-1938), the party purges (1935-1937) and the Moscow Trials (1936-1938) - in their proper political context. Marxists are right to defend the

wounded amid a mounting campaign of assassinations of Communist Party and collective farm leaders.

The massive social conflicts of this period found expression in the great inner-party factional battles grouping Stalin with or against various combinations of Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Trotsky, Radek and others, in the Party purges and the Moscow Trials and other trials of party, military and industrial cadre.

The CPSU leadership had every right to organise purges and trials to defend the socialist state from internal counter-revolutionary opposition. But the critical element for effectively carrying out these operations, a conscious Communist/Bolshevik party, was lacking. By the late 1920s the CPSU had already been seriously infected with reactionary and anti-democratic elements.

The severe excesses during the course of the purges, trials and collectivisation programmes drove a wedge between the Party and the working class and peasantry. Thousands upon thousands of innocent workers, peasants and party members suffered imprisonment, exile and execution including many Bolsheviks who had played a leading role during the early period of the Russian Revolution. Hundreds of thousands died as a result of industrial and agricultural chaos. All this further weakened the CPSU and strengthened the anti-working class elements within it.

Stalin as an individual remained enormously popular among the working class. But the party over which he presided was already in the process of degeneration. As it assumed the task of running a massive economic and state apparatus it spawned a new anti-working class intelligentsia essential for the purpose. This stratum ensured for itself social, material and political privileges that divided it from the mass of the working class. Ever since, it has been working to overthrow working class power. Bruce Franklin, a pro-Stalin Marxist, wrote in his introduction to *The Essential Stalin* that Stalin's chief weakness was that he 'underestimated the threat posed by the new intelligentsia... A serious examination of Stalin's record must take all these factors into account.'

Imperialism and the question of Stalin

However, first and foremost, without placing the development of the USSR in its international context it is impossible to begin a serious political, Marxist examination of the origins of the counter-revolution and the question of Stalinism. The Stalin leadership and all the problems and issues of the Stalin period occurred in definite historical, economic and political conditions over which neither Stalin nor the CPSU had any control: the encirclement and isolation of the USSR by imperialism in alliance with international social democracy.

The unceasing imperialist blockade and isolation of the USSR and the systematic organisation of war and violence against all international attempts at socialist construction since 1917 prevented any sustained development of the socialist planned economy. Over the decades this took its toll, generating and fostering the pro-bourgeois forces within the USSR.

Only the working class of the imperialist countries could have stayed the hand of imperialism. Yet under the leadership of social democracy it actively collaborated in imperialism's anti-communist crusade. Without this collaboration imperialism would not have had the means to isolate and eventually strangle the Russian Revolution. Here, in the role of the working class in the imperialist countries, lies the root of the problems which confronted the Russian Revolution. As Rosa Luxemburg put it: 'the blame for the failures of Bolshevism is borne in the final analysis by the international proletariat and above all by the unprecedented and persistent baseness of German (and we would add British) social democracy.'

The political economy of contentment

It is not often that a book is written that addresses the fundamental problems of politics in the major imperialist economies. It is even less frequent to read one which is centrally concerned with the political and economic consequences of the growing inequalities in capitalist society which extend deep into the working class. DAVID REED analyses 'the culture of contentment'.

ate - the poor, the oppressed and the low paid. No political party represents their interests. In the case of the United States alienation from the political process is so great that half the population does not vote in elections.

Who then are the contented majority? Again Galbraith is reasonably precise. They include the upper and middle management or staff of large financial and industrial firms. Independent businessmen and women and those in lesser employments with more or less guaranteed payment. Also the large professional class - lawyers, doctors, engineers, scientists, accountants and many others including journalists and professors. He includes most importantly 'a certain, if diminishing number, who once were called proletarians' - workers with diverse skills whose wages are now often supplemented by a working wife, and, like others in families with two wages coming in, find life reasonably secure. Finally he includes a rapidly increasing number of old people who have adequate or, on occasion, ample financial provision, as a result of pensions and other allowances, to live out the remaining years of their life.

The 'contented majority' is not simply the 'confusing talk' Chris Harman would have us believe (*Socialist Worker* 30 May 1992). Harman consciously distorts what Galbraith is saying by not telling us that Galbraith's 'contented majority' is a majority of those who vote (not of the total population, as Harman suggests), and that he is not talking of a simple division between rich and poor in US society, for the 'contented majority' includes well-paid skilled workers and their families as well as middle class workers in the 'professions'. It is interesting that the liberal Galbraith



JK Galbraith

is able to acknowledge what the 'Marxist' Harman wants to deny: that imperialism creates a split in the working class which is of enormous political consequence.

An oppressed working class

Opposed to the contented majority is what Galbraith calls the 'functional underclass'. The term 'underclass' has had wide usage among politicians and academic and political writers in recent years. It is one we reject. The term was dug up by right-wing ideologists to marginalise and criminalise the poor. It is racist.

Galbraith does not use the term in this way. For him the 'underclass' is integrally a part of a larger economic process and, more importantly... it serves the living standards and comfort of the more favoured community' (p31). He is referring to a growing section of the working class with low paid, frequently insecure jobs, many temporary or part-time.

These workers do not just have

manual jobs in manufacturing or on factory assembly lines. They work in restaurants, household and other personal services and in low paid public sector jobs (street cleaning, refuse collection, porters, hospital ancillaries etc). In other words they are part of the working class.

Many, we would add, belong to what Marx called the reserve army of labour, whose employment is dependent on the ups and downs of the capitalist economy. Over the Reagan years millions will have become permanently unemployed. 'The great majority consist of members of minority groups, blacks or people of Hispanic origin' (p31).

Galbraith makes the point that this section of the working class is 'deeply functional' in all industrial (he should have said imperialist) countries. 'As some of its members escape from deprivation and its associated compulsions, a resupply becomes essential' (p31). They do the work that the better off workers do not want to do as the latter move into less arduous and better paid jobs. In other words they are part of a process which reinforces and increases divisions in the working class.

Although he never uses the term, Galbraith shows how this process is a central feature of imperialism when he ties it in with the provision of immigrant workers to do the jobs for which indigenous labour is no longer available in the European imperialist countries. As he points out there are marked advantages to this sort of arrangement for capitalism: such workers can be sent home when no longer needed or, as is more often the case, denied entry when there is a surplus (p35). Often they are not able to or do not vote.

A similar process took place in the United States. He speaks of the immigrations from Eastern Europe and

of surplus labour from the farms from the last century to World War I. As this labour supply diminished it was replaced by poor whites from the Appalachian plateau and in increasing numbers black people from the South. In more recent times there has been immigration from Mexico, Latin America and the West Indies. He concludes:

'It is not thought appropriate to say that the modern economy [read imperialist/capitalist economy] - the market system - requires such an underclass [read an oppressed working class], and certainly not that it must reach out to other countries to sustain and refresh it' (p37).

One who does not find it appropriate to say this is Chris Harman who, in his review of Galbraith's book, totally fails to comment on this vital point. Once again it is the liberal Galbraith and not the 'Marxist' Harman who can point to one of the fundamental features of imperialism.

Galbraith goes on to say that the slowdown in economic expansion in the United States and the movement of industry to more favoured locations away from large cities has meant that the relatively stable industrial employment is no longer available for this section of the working class. More importantly the 'normal upward movement [to better jobs etc] that was for long the solvent for discontent has been arrested'. This oppressed section of the working class has now become a semi-permanent feature rather than a generational phenomenon. And as Galbraith says, presaging the recent Los Angeles rising, 'as membership in the underclass becomes stable and enduring - greater resentment and social unrest should be expected' (p40).

Growing inequalities

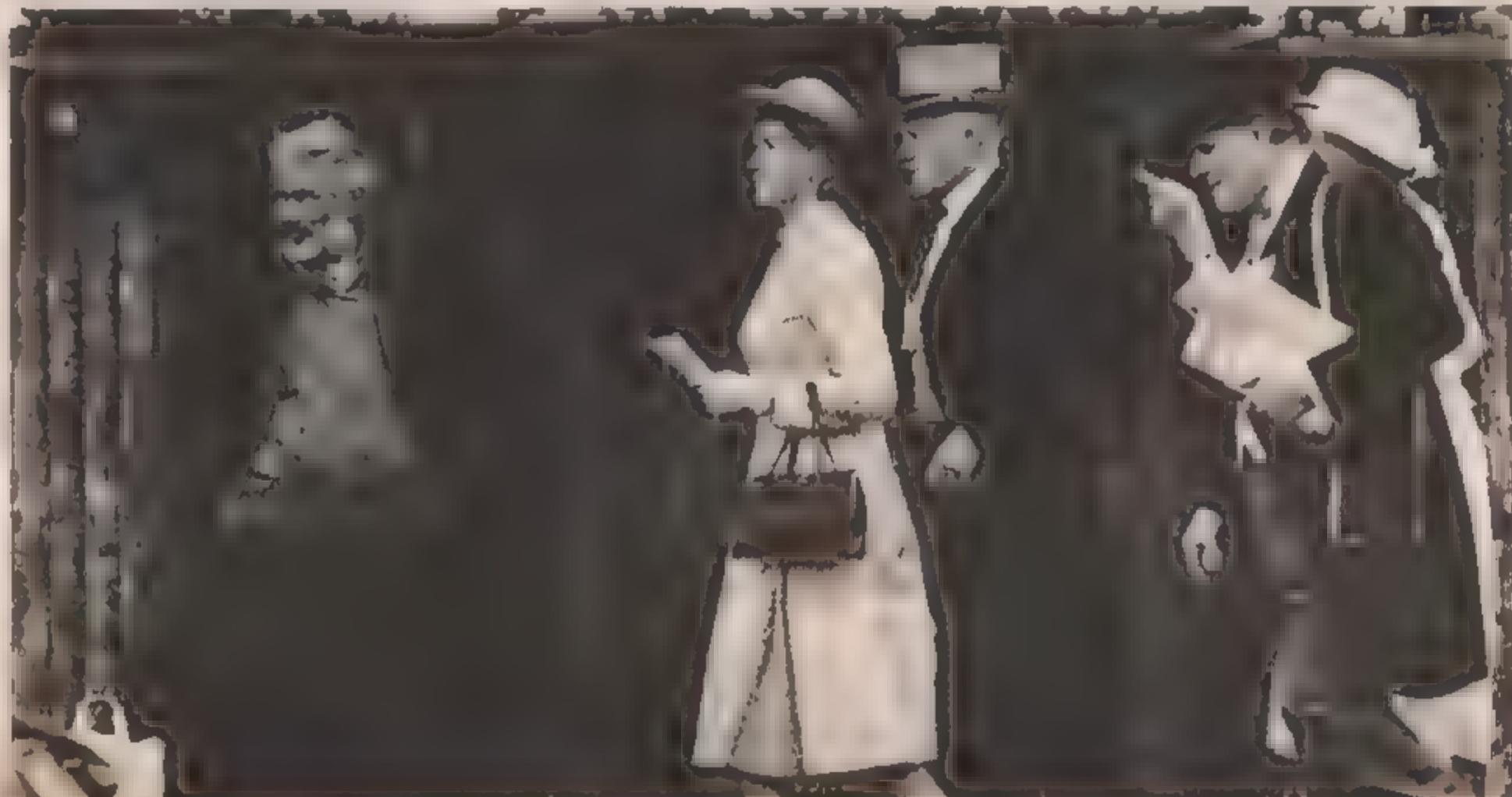
Galbraith tells us that in 1989, in the US 12.5 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line of \$12,674 for a family of four. In the ten years from 1978 to 1988 the numbers living in poverty increased by 28 per cent from 24.5 million to 32 million. The largest number of the poor are black or of Hispanic origin (p13 and p107).

Recent figures confirm this trend. The number of poor increased to 34 million by 1990 or 13.5 per cent of the population and is continuing to rise. However the official poverty 'threshold' is far too low even by the government's own standards. If the level at which people receive 'means-related' government assistance is taken into account, about 75 per cent above the 'official' poverty threshold, then it has been estimated that 69 million people live in poverty or some 28 per cent of the population. A half of these people are black or of Hispanic origin.

Over two decades 1969-1989, according to census data, there was a 5 per cent drop in the ratio of black to white family incomes from 61.3 per cent in 1969 to 56.2 per cent in 1989. In the case of Hispanic families from 1973 (when data began to be systematically collected) to 1989 the average income of Hispanic families fell from 69.2 per cent to 65.2 per cent of white family incomes, a 4 per cent drop. (Recent figures from Vic Perlo, 'Racism - Superprofits: Issues and basic facts', *Political Affairs* February/March 1992.)

The other end of the scale gives a quite different picture. The top one per cent of the families in 1988 had an average income of \$617,000, or 13.5 per cent of pre-tax incomes, and the top 20 per cent earning \$50,000 and above received 51.8 per cent (p14). According to Vic Perlo, in 1990 4.7 per cent of black families had an income above \$75,000, an

continued overleaf



The Culture of Contentment is a book which vividly describes the parasitic and decaying character of US imperialism, and how through the creation of vast inequalities between classes and within the working class in the United States, it is creating forces which could destroy it. It is written by the American liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith.

Deep forebodings run throughout the book. The capitalist system is deeply flawed. Uncontrolled market forces threaten to ravage and even destroy the large financial and business corporations at the heart of the market system. The possibility of what Galbraith calls an 'under-class revolt' exists and grows stronger and is the greatest threat to long-term peace and stability. Explosive social events could result from this process, in the United States and perhaps Britain.

Galbraith wants the system to survive, and he would be delighted if the arguments in his book led to remedial action by those in power. But he believes there is little prospect of such action in the present political circumstances. His book locates the main obstacle to this in the 'culture of contentment' which afflicts the 'contented majority' living in US society.

The culture of contentment

Capitalism has an intrinsic tendency to instability - to recession or depression (p83). However since the Great Depression in the 1930s, says Galbraith, there has been a broad consensus that the government must intervene to mitigate or control such manifestations of instability. Welfare expenditure, environmental and consumer protection, progressive income taxation and support for trade unions 'have gone far to ensure the survival of capitalism' (p52). Galbraith argues that such measures as embodied in the Roosevelt New Deal 'saved the traditional economic system in the United States and the well-being of those who capitalism most favoured' (p8). Similarly, ameliorating the situation of the poor through taxation, unemployment compensation and medical assistance, in spite of the resistance of the rich, saved British capitalism in the grim years after World War I (p3).

Such measures, which we now associate with Keynesian state intervention, have however been prevented in the 1980s by what Galbraith calls the 'contented majority'. Galbraith argues that the fortunate always tend to respond powerfully to their immediate comfort and contentment, ignoring what he believes is 'their own long term well-being'. What is new this time in the capitalist countries is that the 'controlling contentment and resulting belief is now that of the many and not of the few' (p10). As this is a vital point in Galbraith's argument we need to examine it more closely.

'In past times, the economically and socially fortunate were, as we know, a small minority - characteristically a dominant and ruling handful. They are now a majority not of all citizens but of those who actually vote' (p15, our emphasis).

This is an important political point. Galbraith is arguing that those who are well off and who resist any encroachment on their privileges are a majority of those who participate in the 'democratic' process in the United States. It has as a corollary the fact that the major political parties only give political expression to the interests of the privileged - it is how they get elected to power. In turn this means that the institutions of bourgeois democracy exclude the participation of the less fortun-

continued from page 11

increase on the 1.4 per cent who had an equivalent amount in 1990 prices in 1974. (The number of black families with incomes under \$5,000 in constant dollars rose from 5.8 percent to 11.8 percent in the same period)

In 1980 chief executive officers of the 300 largest US companies had incomes 29 times that of the average manufacturing worker. By 1990 their incomes were 93 times greater. In the same period the income of the average American fell slightly.

Finally this was the period in which theories, or more correctly prejudices, were peddled, without the slightest scientific backing, justifying growing inequalities of income, as well as tax cuts for the rich and welfare cuts for the poor. The former apparently would help the poor due to the 'trickle down' effect, and the latter would spur the poor to greater endeavours. Reagan decreased the tax rate on the rich from a partly nominal 70 per cent to 50 per cent in 1981 and 28 per cent in 1986 (p27). Galbraith believes that such obscene inequalities in income distribution are accepted by the relatively better off because 'the price of any aggression against one's own income is tolerance of greater amount for others' (p26).

Little wonder that today the law and order lobby in the US is in full cry and there are more private security guards than publicly employed policemen in the United States as the better off retreat into their heavily secured enclaves (p45).

The political economy of contentment

Monetarism, with its emphasis on high interest rates to curb inflation and its resistance to tax increases and social expenditure, is the economic policy most in tune with the culture of contentment. Those with money to lend, the well-endowed rentier class, those living off invested wealth, will all benefit. In the US in the 1980s personal income from interest payments rose from \$272bn to \$681bn, by 150 per cent, while income from wage payments increased by 97 per cent.

High interest rates discourage productive investment and housing construction. Together with deregulation of financial institutions and markets they have been the driving force behind the speculative mergers and acquisitions boom, the corporate raids and management buyouts, the junk bonds and insider dealing, the real estate speculation etc of the 1980s in the unseemly scramble for the vast rewards available to those who come out on top. Enormous fees accrue to those who provide legal, underwriting and financial expertise. Parasitism, speculation and corruption have become the predominant features of US capitalism.

The state is regarded as a burden and the most applauded slogan is 'to get government off the backs of the people' (p22). But there have been costly exceptions to this position. Social expenditure that favours the better-off, financial rescue for depositors in failed banks and savings and loan enter-

prises, military spending and interest payments are in aggregate the largest and fastest increasing part of the federal budget. The remaining expenditure on welfare, low cost housing, health care for those not otherwise protected, public education, on a deteriorating economic infrastructure and expenditure on urban slums are all regarded as a 'burden of government' (p21-6).

Under the ostensible threat of communism, the military establishment, military spending and the associated operations of the CIA escaped the normal constraints of political and economic life. Between 1980 and 1990 military



spending increased from \$143bn to \$314bn, 5.2 to 6.5 per cent of the gross national product. Between a quarter and a third of US scientific and engineering personnel in recent years were employed in weapons research and development.

In reality US imperialism was defending its 'freedom' to brutally exploit the people and the resources of the Third World. There is a preference for short, successful and not unduly expensive wars which create as little discomfort as possible for the families of the better-off. Direct and proxy US interventions abroad during the 1980s included Angola, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Grenada, El Salvador, Libya, Nicaragua, Panama and the Middle East.

Since 1973 and the suspension of general military conscription as a result of opposition from the affluent young in the universities to the Vietnam War, it has been accepted that the better off should not be forced into military service. Advertisements for the armed forces now stress economic advantage and training to attract recruits. Numbers of recruits from the age-eligible population fall steadily as incomes increase and markedly as incomes pass the \$19,600 to \$23,300 bracket (1987). This is reflected in statistics for 1989: black people account for approximately 22 per cent of recruits as compared with 14 per cent of the population. The proportion in the army, the hardest and most dangerous service, is above 25 per cent.

The decline of US imperialism

The one major weakness in Galbraith's book is that he is unable to explain why the broad consensus for state intervention in the economy, to mitigate the effects of recession and poverty, has broken down. In putting it down to the short-term interests of the 'contented majority of those who vote' he confuses what is essentially a

product of change with its cause.

Throughout the post-war period, as the overwhelmingly dominant imperialist power, US capitalism could sustain a high standard of living for an increasing proportion of its population as a result of the unparalleled superprofits derived from its domination of the capitalist world economy; and, in particular, through its super-exploitation of the labour and mineral resources of the Third World. Galbraith's 'contented majority' would have grown in numbers in those years and state spending would have sustained their privileges and countered the effects of recession for large numbers of the poor.

It is the relative decline of US imperialism in relation to the growing economic power of Japan and Germany which is decisive in explaining why the broad consensus for state intervention in the economy has broken down. It is no longer economically feasible for US capitalism to sustain the privileges of the contented majority while ameliorating the conditions of the poor. The particular conditions which allowed this from the mid-1930s onwards - US imperialism becoming the overwhelmingly dominant imperialist power, economically and militarily - began to disappear at the beginning of the 1970s.

In the 1980s, high interest rates, the persistent and growing budget deficits, and large trade deficits have accelerated US imperialism's decline from being the world's largest creditor nation to its greatest debtor.

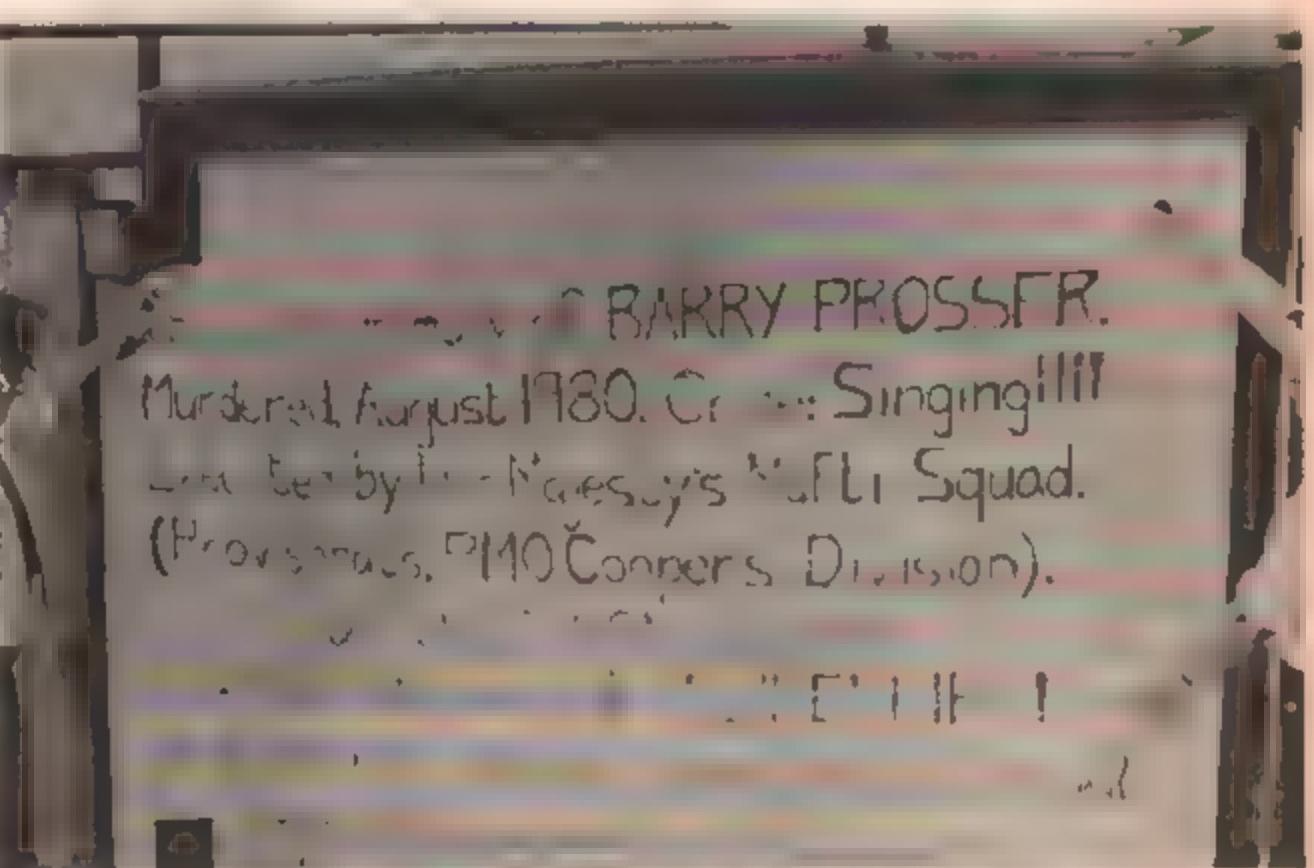
It is indicative of that decline that during the Gulf War to protect US imperialism's oil interests in the Middle East, the US armed forces, as Galbraith says, acted as a mercenary force extensively subsidised by Japan, Germany and Saudi Arabia (p120).

These are the conditions which have led the traditional ruling class political parties, Republicans and Democrats to refuse to put forward policies promising better services for those most in need. For it would be, indeed, an exercise in political self-destruction to do so. In turn this has meant that these political parties have increasingly alienated the oppressed working class who have little interest in a process which is progressively excluding them. The process is mutually reinforcing. With economic conditions driving millions more into poverty, the interests of the 'contented majority' become more and more decisive in determining the outcome of elections. In the case of the United States, the 'contented majority' is now a majority of those who vote.

US capitalism has reached an impasse. Ruling out the possibility of a 'strong and successful political appeal to the disadvantaged', we can agree with Galbraith that: 'The present age of contentment will come to an end' either through 'widespread economic disaster, adverse military action that is associated with an international adventure, [or] eruption of an angry underclass' (p157).

Part 2 in the next issue of FRFI will examine the relevance of Galbraith's ideas to Britain

The Culture of Contentment, JK Galbraith, Sinclair-Stevenson Ltd 1992 £14.95 Hbk. Page numbers in the text refer to this book



Banner from rooftop protest, Winson Green, September 1981

Winson Green in the dock

From 22 to 26 June at Birmingham High Court the extent of Home Office complicity in prison officer brutality was revealed during a civil action which I brought after being beaten up at Winson Green in February 1989, writes JOHN BOWDEN. Despite overwhelming medical evidence supporting my claim of assault, and a well-documented history of staff violence at the prison, (eg the murder of Barry Prosser and the beating up of the Birmingham Six), the Home Office chose to contest the case and strenuously defend the uniformed thugs involved.

The facts I presented to the court were straightforward: on 24 February 1989, after my involvement in a food strike at Long Lartin prison I was transferred to a high-security isolation unit called D3 at Winson Green prison in Birmingham. Prisoners transferred from long-term gaols like Long Lartin and Gartree for 'disciplinary' reasons were regularly placed in Winson Green D3 unit and rumours of brutality and staff violence at the unit had become commonplace.

... a beating-up was about to happen because a reception committee of about ten warders had congregated in the unit

Less than three hours after arriving I was subjected to an unprovoked and vicious assault by approximately ten prison officers, most of whom were in a drunken condition. I was punched, kicked, headbutted, stripped naked and dragged through a gauntlet of warders to a 'strong-box' cell. X-rays later revealed that I had suffered a badly fractured rib and my body was covered with multiple bruising.

Hassan Khan and Ronnie Bolden, both prisoners in D3 at the time, appeared as witnesses on my behalf and gave chilling accounts to the court of life under the regime of Senior Officer David Espie and his cohorts. Prisoners were always unlocked individually from their cells and so were easy prey for an eight-strong gang of warders, who drank regularly during lunch-breaks and usually returned to the unit in the afternoons to select

prisoners for beatings. Most prisoners were too terrified to complain and the non-supervision of the unit by senior management at the prison ensured that Espie and his gang were allowed a free hand to deal with malcontents.

Describing the atmosphere on the day of my arrival, Hassan Khan said he could sense a beating-up was about to happen because a reception committee of about ten warders had congregated in the unit. Previous experience warned him that this was usually the prelude to the beating up of a new arrival.

Both prisoners witnessed the assault on me through the Judas-holes in their cell-doors and both timed the duration by their watches: it lasted 25 minutes.

After his release from Winson Green, Ronnie Bolden wrote to the Home Office complaining about the treatment of prisoners in D3 and in particular about the assault on me. Eventually he was informed that a police investigation was currently underway into my 'allegations' and that his letter would be passed on to the police officers conducting the investigation. Ronnie Bolden was never interviewed about what he had witnessed; in fact, the police 'investigation' amounted to a superficial and pally questioning of the warders involved before the police decided that 'insufficient evidence' existed to warrant prosecution of anyone.

Inevitably, the counsel for the Home Office, ably assisted by the Treasury Solicitor's representative, attempted to discredit the evidence of Hassan Khan and Ronnie Bolden by dredging up their criminal records and portraying both as embittered ex-convicts with an axe to grind.

Attempting to discredit the evidence of Dr Gillian Jones, former Assistant Senior Medical Officer at

Winson Green and currently SMO at Whitemoor prison, was rather more difficult. Questioned in court about her decision to place and then keep me in the hospital wing after I was beaten up, despite the protestations of Espie to the prison governor that I should remain in D3, Dr Jones admitted she feared for my safety. She went on to explain that she had treated many prisoners at the gaol who had borne the obvious marks of beatings, usually after having been 'restrained' by warders. She said my injuries were consistent with such a beating. She also told the court that while I was in the hospital wing, she was approached by various warders who were quite specific about their intentions about me should I be returned to D3. In her presence they referred to me as an 'animal' and warned her that given the chance I would take her hostage.

In reply to all the witnesses and medical evidence supporting my claim of assault, the Home Office counsel offered a defence based on a characterisation of me as an 'intelligent psychopath' with a 'pathological hatred' of the prison system, a hatred so great I would inflict injuries on myself in an attempt to discredit prison officers.

A number of prison staff were called to give evidence on behalf of the Home Office, and all in parrot fashion attested that I had been 'argumentative and aggressive' in the D3 Unit and so had been placed 'under restraint' for my own safety and that of prison staff. When cross-examined about the severity of my injuries all became suddenly very vague and evasive, glancing anxiously at the Home Office barrister for guidance and assistance. Asked about the sort of regime that existed in the D3 Unit on 24 February 1989 and the total power enjoyed by the screws administering it, Espie replied that no such regime existed, though if it had, it sounded like 'paradise' from a prison officer's perspective.

The final judgement of the court will either hold the state legally accountable for its brutalisation of prisoners, or alternatively reaffirm that prisoners have absolutely no rights

On the first day of the case, the judge agreed to my lawyer's request to clear the public gallery of a gang of Winson Green screws whose presence was clearly intimidatory. Whenever in the cell-block below the court I was guarded constantly by two warders from a prison outside Birmingham. Both admitted to me that so intense was the feeling of malevolence towards me by the Winson Green screws who staffed the cell-block, that they themselves felt threatened.

On 26 June the judge adjourned the hearing, expressing a wish to visit and inspect the D3 unit before the resumption of the hearing on 10 August.

The importance of this case should not be underestimated; its implications and ramifications should it be won or lost are enormous. It is very much a test case that tries the inclination and will of the courts to uphold the basic human rights of prisoners, especially those prisoners categorised as 'subversive' and in need of 'special measures'. The legal status of such prisoners is at issue in this case and the final judgement of the court will either hold the state legally accountable for its brutalisation of such prisoners, or alternatively reaffirm that prisoners have absolutely no rights that the state is bound to recognise or respect. ■

Belmarsh prison: the way ahead or the road to nowhere?

In 1991 a delegation consisting of the Home Secretary and Prison Department officials visited the United States to examine firsthand the much discussed 'new generation' prisons. This delegation (and one wonders if the chairman of the POA was one of the delegates) has emerged with nothing other than new concepts of control to supplement their existing ones. Belmarsh prison is one of Britain's 'new generation' prisons and the ultimate in totalitarianism within the context of the total institution. It is physically structured to provide maximum surveillance with a high staff ratio and maximum restraints on movements. This latest 'model' supplement to the government's prison building programme incorporates a regime that by local standards is a slight improvement, but, by dispersal standards even more oppressive than some of the more notorious establishments such as Wakefield, and those on the Isle of Wight which are managed in the true traditions of the POA: 'Give 'em nowt and tell 'em nowt! PAUL ROSS had the misfortune to visit the estimated £100 million complex at Thamesmead when he was transferred to Belmarsh for accumulated visits. In this article he describes the experience.

My transfer was finalised after numerous excuses and considerable procrastination and I was to be there for at least four weeks. After a chaotic journey during which the petrol ran out, there was a minor collision, we got 'lost' and I was violently sick, we eventually arrived at Belmarsh. The first thing to impress itself on my mind, within minutes of arrival, was the number of ex-Wandsworth warders working there, some of whom I recognised immediately.

The reception process was a minor ordeal in itself: personal property was scrutinised with a fervour verging on paranoia. Various personal items were removed from my possession under the all-embracing justification: 'You're not allowed that here!' Not content with this, on arrival at the Category 'A' Unit yet more personal property was removed from my possession. In accordance with the Tumim report on suicides, a television was installed in the reception to keep inmates occupied but with typical Prison Department logic, this particular set had no aerial!

It was eventually decided I should be located on a medical wing with people who required constant supervision/medication, possibly to minimise any 'subversive' influence I might exert on other prisoners. Among the many bizarre features of Belmarsh was that Remands and Convicted were kept together on the wings and treated basically the same which, all in all, was a good thing for the convicted prisoners as they could have extra visits and spend unlimited private cash in the canteen etc. But the Remands were treated like convicted criminals and in some instances were pressured into work with statements such as, 'You're in the shop tomorrow!' to which some inmates responded, 'No way, I'm on remand!' This inevitably invoked the reply, 'You're only young. You'll fucking learn!' or 'You'll not get any money!'

By far the most disturbing aspect of Belmarsh was the apparently windowless segregation unit in the Category 'A' facility. Fortunately, due to the ubiquitous alleged shortages of staff, it has yet to be used.

There are no facilities for accumulated visits at Belmarsh and the Category 'A' visiting facilities are the

worst I have encountered with visits conducted in a portacabin, the only refreshments being provided by a drinks dispensing machine, but the most traumatic experience for me, given the reason for my transfer to Belmarsh, was the victimisation of my family who were refused permission to visit me. A Category 'A' prisoner is required to have all prospective visitors, including close family, vetted by the police on behalf of the Home Office. This condition is mandatory. It involves police authorities visiting prisoners' families and friends. They can, if they so wish, prevent any prospective visitor from visiting a prisoner on any number of pretexts. Visitors are required to furnish photographs of themselves to the Home Office and the prison where the prisoner is detained, again this includes family. These photographs are then filed on record both centrally and at the prison.

I have refused outright to allow my family to be criminalised by the state in this fashion. As a consequence of this refusal, my mother was initially refused permission to visit me. However I created such a furore that she was eventually allowed in to see me but only after being delayed at the gatehouse for over an hour. When the visit did eventually take place it was under the most intimidating conditions imaginable ie in an eight foot by eight foot 'room' with two staff present throughout the visit. This was in flagrant breach of Home Office regulations as I'm not on high-risk visits. My entire stay at Belmarsh was characterised by this kind of behaviour and attitude by staff who also imposed a blanket ban on smoking on visits. I was not allowed visits from my cousin and other family members.

The exercise facilities were deplorable and degrading by any civilised standards with only 12 inmates at any one time being permitted outdoors within a 'caged area' kept under constant surveillance by two members of staff and six cameras. If the numbers on the wings fell below 12 someone could go to another spur for the day to see his friends. I do not know why it is the magic number 12, maybe it's because the staff and governor are superstitious!

The food is provided by private contractors but falls below even local

prison standards. It is bland and overcooked and certainly nothing to write home about. Belmarsh has integral sanitation but the toilets are situated at the bottom of the bed in the cell which is the equivalent of living in a lavatory and all meals are eaten in the cells which is unhygienic. This is partly because there is no association at night or during the periods normally reserved for association in the mainstream prison system, and if staff feel that a sink and toilet in a cell is the be all and end all of prison reform they should take a more stringent look at the Woolf Report, or read *One-Off*.

Authoritarian abuses in prison take many forms, from minor infringements of regulations to physical maltreatment. I have experienced most of them over the years, however, at Belmarsh I came across a form of impropriety I had never encountered before. Unlike at other prisons, prisoners wishing to report sick have to wait until the afternoon, the doctors rounds being held at 2pm. Should a prisoner's formal application to see the doctor coincide with a visit, the prisoner must either forfeit his visit or forfeit his right of access to the doctor. (Sic)

Any application to see a governor has to go through the wing officers. The governors themselves are not consulted over applications or are only given an extremely abridged version of the nature of applications. Prisoners reading should be warned that at Belmarsh if you think you are speaking to a governor you should check his or her identity as it may turn out to be a prison officer in civvies (MUFTI).

I remained at Belmarsh for five days of the intended 28 before being forced into requesting my return to Hull. Had I remained there would have been the real possibility of serious confrontation as the potential for conflict was ever present. If Belmarsh is a foretaste of the future 'new generation' style prison then it is inevitable there will be major disturbances, far worse than the minor disturbances at The Wolds (private sector) prison which the POA is so fond of reminding us of. The Prison Department has learned nothing at all from the events resulting in the 1990 prison revolt.

KEVIN O'NEILL – Correction to article in FRFI 105.

The detail concerning Kevin O'Neill should not have implied he couldn't read. It should have suggested that on that occasion/in that situation Kevin would not have been able to read it. Kevin is dyslexic. He was certainly able to read at the time of his arrest but the pressures of the situation mean he would have been unable to assimilate words in front of him. Indeed the whole processing of information ability is crucial to Kevin's appeal case. The Home Office have started moving on his case. Jenny O'Neill

ONE-OFF

Joe Sim of Liverpool Polytechnic has written a new preface for *One-Off*, the study of prison suicide by Paul Ross and Andrzej Jakubczyk, reviewed in FRFI 107. Sim says that *One-Off* 'provides an insight into the closed world of the prison from the still marginalised and often vilified perspective of prisoners... It clearly illustrates that prisoners' views about penal policy can be and are as reasonable as those who plan penal policy and indeed in many ways are more realistic and positive than much of what passes for penological opinion in this society.' Copies of *One-Off* are available from FRFI price £3 plus 60p p&p (make cheques payable to Larkin Publications) or directly from the authors, c/o A Wing, HMP Hull, Hedon Road, Hull HU9 5LS.

JOHN McGRAIGHAN

As readers will know, John was released last year after serving 11 years for crimes of which he was completely innocent. Since his release he has actively campaigned for the release of other framed prisoners. The day after Judy Ward finally had her conviction overturned and was led in jubilation from the court by John and Annie MacGuire, John had a heart attack. He told FRFI that he holds the state responsible: 'They had me nixed off, lifed off and now they're trying to kill me off!' The official explanation is stress – 11 years in gaol for something you didn't do is enough to make anyone suffer stress. Get well cards and messages can be sent via FRFI.

THE CHEETHAM FIVE

The trial opened in Manchester on 29 June of the 'Cheetham 5'. Three of the five are members of the Noonan family and the family's notoriety, both in Manchester and in prison has led to massive harassment of the five while on remand awaiting trial. Dessy Noonan was remanded on Category 'A' in the infamous Wakefield segregation unit. For news about the trial and pickets of the court phone the Cheetham Five campaign on 061 792 4766.

ALLEN McGOW

Following all the pressure exerted on the Home Office by his friends and supporters (see FRFI 107), Allen has now been moved back from Parkhurst to Hull. Allen sends his thanks to everyone who wrote letters and protested on his behalf. ■

POWs' birthdays

Tommy Quigley B89204
HMP Full Sutton, York YO4 1PS
23 July
Stephen Nordone 758663
HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue, Braxide, Durham DH1 5YD
2 August
Paul Kavanagh L31888
HMP Full Sutton 12 August

Cuban revolution vindicated

Cuba: the revolution in peril by Janette Habel, translated from the French by Jon Barnes. Verso 1989, revised and updated 1991, £19.95 hbk.

At a time when Trotskyist attacks on Cuba are largely indistinguishable from those of the right, this book by French Fourth Internationalist Janette Habel makes a refreshing change. *Cuba: the revolution in peril* was written in 1989, with a postscript added in early 1991, prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite setting out to argue for a challenge to 'the bureaucratic model which is now devouring the revolution', what Habel in fact provides is a resounding vindication of the Cuban revolution.

The entire discussion of Cuba's economic and political trajectory is located in the context of the attempt to build socialism in a world dominated by imperialism.

'Cuba's economic difficulties, extensively highlighted by the international press, are mainly the result of an embargo imposed by the world's leading economic power on a small, under-developed country of ten million people... in addition, the already conditional and haphazard aid provided by the Soviet Union has now been placed in question.'

Cuba's dependence on the export of sugar is well-known. Prior to the collapse of the socialist countries, 80 per cent of its trade was with the Soviet Union and the socialist countries on generally favourable terms of exchange. This contrasts with Cuba's attempts to develop markets with the capitalist world. There it found itself subject to unequal terms of exchange and vulnerable to fluctuations in world market prices, with cheap sugar from heavily-subsidised EC beet production flooding an already saturated market; this, together with aggressive marketing of synthetic sweeteners meant that, as Habel argues, Cuba's socialist development was subject to the constraints of imperialism. She refutes the argument that Cuba's economic problems lay with a planned economy and rejection of economic liberalisation.

'Fashionable in Western circles, such judgements are suspect to say the least. They generally do not say a word about the dramatic effects of the US blockade (on nickel, for example, whose price is rising on the world market as the United States opposes the purchase of any material containing Cuban nickel)'



and (in spite of her hostility to what she calls 'the bureaucratic regimes' of the Eastern bloc) argues:

'Cuba does not have an alternative to economic links with the Soviet Union, in so far as US pressure means that the natural outlet of the Latin American market is not accessible for the foreseeable future'.

There is no doubt that without the support of the Soviet Union Cuba could not have survived and achieved the levels of social provision for the working class for which it is justly acclaimed. In 1970, however, the campaign for a 10 million tonne sugar harvest, heavily promoted as a way out of the economic crisis, failed.

Cuba had little option other than to tie itself to long-term economic dependence on the Soviet Union. According to Habel, those closely associated with the devastating failure, such as Castro, were forced to take a backseat (Habel quotes author García Marquez's description of Castro's vetted speeches of the time as 'captive... stilled by the strait-jacket of the written text'). In this period, political trends who favoured a dogmatic and uncritical acceptance of the Soviet economic model got the upper hand. Cuba turned to the Soviet example of market incentives and limited private enterprise: the seventies became a period of extensive financial and political corruption.

with the enrichment of Party officials, enterprise managers, and the new 'technocrats' at the expense of the working class, and the burgeoning of a wealthy layer of small farmers as private farmers' markets were allowed to operate. Wage differentials increased and the fall in living standards for the majority of the working class, in spite of the continuing provision of free and universal health care and education, created undoubtedly social tensions. This was the backdrop to the rectification process, which Habel rightly points to as a landmark in the history of the Cuban revolution.

The rectification process, initiated by the trade union movement, the Young Communists and the core of 26 July Movement adherents around Castro in 1986, was presented by Castro not just as 'a duty, but as a vital necessity'. As Habel points out, 'the increase in privileges, corruption and inequalities was weakening the unity and cohesion of the workers and breaking their revolutionary spirit and confidence'. At the same time as *perestroika* in the USSR, but in practice in complete contradiction to it, rectification marked a return to the political and economic theory of Che Guevara, a conscious assault on corruption and a revitalisation of moral, rather than material incentives. Habel quotes extensively from Castro: 'We have been bogged down with bureaucracy, surplus staff, anachronistic working practices, trickery and lies - Che would have been horrified if he had been told that one day enterprises would steal to be profitable... If Che had been told that the attitude of our workers would become more and more corrupt each day... for he knew that that path could only lead to the eventual loss of any idea of human solidarity, or even of internationalism.'

Rectification represented a systematic assault on corruption and privilege. Thousands of corrupt Party officials left Cuba with hoards of embezzled foreign currency. Wage differentials were slashed, and the farmers' markets closed down. Although this coincided with the beginning of the 'special period' of Cuba's economic crisis - linked to the growing problems in relation to trade with Eastern Europe - and the introduction of austerity measures, after rectification, Habel shows, rationing ensured equal access to what limited resources existed by the vast majority. In 1988, Cuban political writer Martínez Heredia summed up the aim of rectification as follows:

'Rather than accepting reversal or stagnation, it is aimed at deepening a process of transition in a small Third World country which is openly fighting, along with the progressive and revolutionary forces of the region, the harassment of imperialism. A country whose economic system cannot provide the accumulation required for rapid development, and which still bears the marks of underdevelopment... is aimed at resolving, through revolutionary - that is to say, socialist and partly communist - methods, the multiple tensions produced by the relations between the economy and politics... the need for a centralized regime and one where there is effective popular participation...'

The occasional punctuations of Trotskyist orthodoxy - random attacks on a 'bureaucracy' which are never substantiated - appear to come out of the blue in the generally illuminating discussion of Cuba's economic and political development. However, it becomes a serious flaw in the chapters dealing with political democracy in Cuba.

Despite the proven ability of the Cuban Communist Party to correct its own mistakes in the interests of the working class, Habel persists in calling for a multi-party democracy. Caught between a correct understanding of the constraints imposed by imperialist hostility, and her attempts to represent her Party line, the result is confusion, as the following extract from the 1991 postscript highlights.

'Saul Landau has argued that one cannot demand "a revolutionary leadership in the Third World to adhere to US norms regarding civil liberties when it is attacked through force and violence by the US government" and when the CIA supports subversion. Indeed, behind the word democracy hides a challenge to the revolution, aimed at re-establishing interests which have nothing to do with those of the people. But while Fidel Castro cannot be reproached for refusing to swap the legitimacy of the revolution for the legality of rigged elections, and while his demands for the lifting of the trade embargo and the return of the Guantánamo base are understandable, nevertheless one cannot endorse his general approach in which the single party/state party is the only guarantor of the revolution.'

Well, can one or can't one? The unrelenting political and ideological battle being waged against Cuba by imperialism today was given recent expression by the March CIA-backed terrorist attack. To call for a multi-party democracy in these conditions is to give legitimacy to the US-backed dissidents whose aim is the overthrow of the Cuban revolution, a wretched capitulation to bourgeois illusions in parliamentary democracy. The 97-98 per cent turnout to vote in municipal elections, the fact that dissidents have stood freely for such elections - and been defeated, and the undoubted popular support enjoyed by the Party, while cited, are passed over in favour of an idealism which can only strengthen reactionary trends in Cuba.

Nonetheless, Habel's genuine, if confused, attempt to explain Cuba's struggles and achievements on the difficult road to socialism, and the sheer volume of information, citations and statistics that she has unearthed and reproduced with rigorous honesty make this book well worth reading. ■

Susan Davidson

Cat Wiener

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Thriller against racism

Community Brigade by Milton Smalling. First Class Publications, PO Box 1799 London W9 2BZ, M185.

This is a drama-script which would make a wonderful television play. It can also be read as a long short story because there are plenty of descriptions of the characters, locations and action.

Community Brigade is a fast-moving thriller, much of which takes place in cars and on the streets of south east London. It is 'entertainment' of the best kind, one in which we care about the characters because we recognise them from our own lives or affecting our own lives. Some are 'good', which is to say ordinary mortals like ourselves, others are greedy, treacherous and cowardly and we desperately hate them.

The story is about the cold-blooded

murder of a young black man on the streets of London. His friends do not rest until they have uncovered the trail that led to his death even at risk of their own lives.

Police corruption and drugs are central to the plot but the real theme is the racism that saturates the pores of British society and affects us all. In the words of one character, 'I was born in Clapham. That's in England. OK? And sometimes I feel like I'm doing time in this country'.

But the black community in this book are not presented as victims or an underclass or indeed a lumpen-proletariat as they have been described so often by the British left and assorted sociologists. They are an integral part of the working class and share all its characteristics. They are young and old, employed and out of work, kind and unkind, weak or

strong. But whatever they are is imprisoned by racism.

Milton Smalling, born in Jamaica but brought up in England, writes well about how everyday experiences can suddenly be vitiated by the poison of racism. It is a pleasure to welcome *Community Brigade* as an addition to the growing number of publications from black British authors. It is no doubt difficult, but it is very important that young black writers continue to find a voice amid the mountains of middle class novels published every year. This is Milton Smalling's fourth book. His poetry is published in three previous volumes under the titles, *Lying on the Edge of Paradise*, *Fighting Spirit* and *The Battlefield* and are all highly recommended reading. ■

Nonetheless, Habel's genuine, if confused, attempt to explain Cuba's struggles and achievements on the difficult road to socialism, and the sheer volume of information, citations and statistics that she has unearthed and reproduced with rigorous honesty make this book well worth reading. ■

LETTERS

Write to FRFI BCM Box 5909, London, WC1N 3XX

Police deny access to public hearing

I have attended many 'security' courts since 1988 at the request of prisoners. On 9 July I tried to attend a remand hearing at Arbour Square Magistrates' Court, East London. I was refused entry, despite having several items of valid ID. The prisoner's brother and brother-in-law missed the hearing after going through the security procedures. We were the only members of the public there that day, and were kept waiting outside for 45 minutes with guns trained on us.

When I complained at my exclusion, the Chief Inspector at the court said that the police would vet individuals going in and refuse entry 'on security grounds'. The police, it seems,

now have a new power to determine whether a remand hearing is held in private.

Of the 15 people charged with political offences related to Ireland between August 1987 and March 1992, only four were convicted. I observed and took notes at eleven of these hearings, including those of the Winchester 3 (freed on appeal), Dessie Ellis (acquitted at trial), Siobhan McKane (charges dropped at committal due to lack of evidence) and Martin Doherty (charges dropped after three months due to lack of evidence). Their cases were followed in the remand courts, at public hearings and they did not have to waste their lives in prison. The current remand prisoners deserve the same right to a public hearing.

WENDY DIXON
South London

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Movement for a Scottish republic

As a member of the Movement for a Scottish Republic I welcome the debate on Scottish independence initiated by Mike Taylor and taken up by Lorna Reid, and would like to add the following comments.

British capitalism produced the world's first capitalist state out of the formerly independent nations of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. This state united the native bourgeoisie in a British ruling class. The superprofits of empire permitted, alongside the development of this unionist ruling class, a unionist middle class and their unionist labour lieutenants, the Labour Party and TUC bureaucrats (not forgetting the Orange Order). This bourgeois unity has disunited the working class so that the struggle for democratic rights in Ireland is portrayed by right and left as sectarian and threatening working class unity. The unity of the UK state is said to be necessary for working class unity.

As Britain's historic economic decline continues the ability of the ruling class to maintain their own unity and the unity of their state is undermined. Sections of the national bourgeoisie of England, Scotland and Wales contemplate grabbing UK assets for themselves. At the same time movements from below from Republicans in Ireland to the Anti-Poll Tax movement on the mainland constantly gnaw at the state's foundations.

Resistance to the Poll Tax in Scotland was stiffened by the widely-held notion that the Westminster government had no democratic mandate in Scotland. Further, Labour Party rule lost all legitimacy when they became enthusiastic Tory Tax Collectors. These factors contributed to the increase in the SNP vote in the general election and the collapse of the Labour vote in some of their

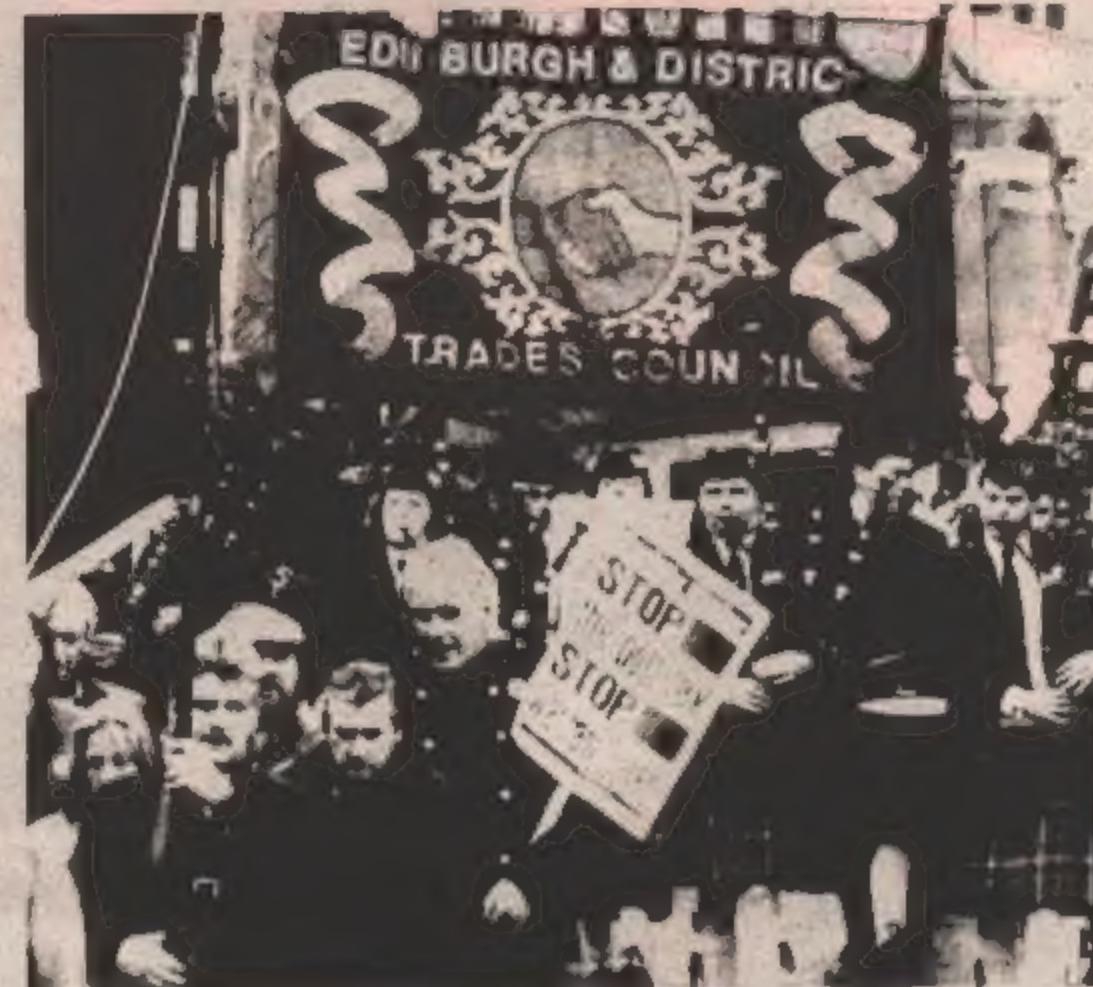
degree of exploitation. The workers are the source both of the value which is paid back in wages to them and the surplus value which is realised as profit. That is why Marx called the capital laid out as wages 'variable' capital. It alone is exchanged for the source of surplus value.

Take the same technical conditions and the same branch of production but vary the conditions of oppression of the working class. Imperialism conducts this experiment all the time. British Leyland has the same factory in South Africa that it has in Britain. But the workers are paid four times less in South Africa. Their productivity is just the same as their British fellows (or is there a master race?). They produce the same value but they are far more exploited. The surplus value created, and hence the rate of exploitation is far higher in Leyland SA, and this is realised as a far higher rate of profit on the overall capital advanced. Other examples? Pilkingtons in Turkey?

The super-profits that come back to Leyland and Pilkingtons benefit British capital as a whole which joins in the share out. Historically they have been used in part to buy layers of privilege and social peace. And in South Africa or Turkey, the oppressive conditions relate not simply to the group of workers employed, but to the mass of even poorer sections of the working class.

Who could possibly benefit from denying these facts of life?

ANDY HIGGINBOTTOM
London



former strongholds eg West Lothian, in the district elections.

Given that the UK is breaking up, it seems to me that communists have to make a choice between supporting the unionists in attempting to slow the process down and leaving the national issue to the leadership of the SNP and the Labourites Scotland United or attempting to give a lead. This will involve linking the national question to working class demands over what kind of society an independent Scotland will be. Will there be an amnesty for Poll Tax non-payers (with restitution paid to Tommy Sheridan for his time in jail)? Will more low-cost housing be built and hospitals better staffed under local control? Will Scottish troops be pulled out of Ireland? etc.

The break up of the British state, Scottish self-determination and the solution to pressing social needs will be accelerated by encouraging working class people to reject Westminster rule. Organise amongst themselves and make Scotland ungovernable by the British ruling class and their allies whilst striving for maximum solidarity with our

A US political prisoner writes

I have just finished reading the latest issue of *FRFI* and was quite impressed with both the news and political analysis. As usual, it was an outstanding issue. I particularly liked your editorial, 'Facing the future' which addressed the needs of communists seeking direction in the post-Soviet era. And, as a prisoner, I was delighted to read the George Jackson and Attica articles. Both were quite good. Thanks for continuing to provide people with such valuable information.

As it happens, I've printed a review of *FRFI* in the June issue of the *Prison Legal News*. While I also plugged *The Leninist* pretty well, I personally tend to see them as being overly dogmatic, with a touch of ultra-leftism not unlike that Lenin attributed to Trotsky. I think they spend too much of their time attacking other forces on the left. And while I'm all for drawing sharp political lines and supporting polemical forms of struggle, when it becomes an end in itself the process becomes tiresome.

I would like to develop a closer working relationship with you, although I'm not sure how that might be developed in practice. One thing is for sure, when a communist political centre eventually develops, I want to be an active part of it.

ED MEAD

Washington State Reformatory USA

struggle, which is central to the working classes of Ireland and Britain, bears only the most abstract and superficial comparison to any struggle for self-determination in Scotland. The Anti-Poll Tax Movement in Scotland would really have been something if it had learned even a little from the Republicans of Ireland! However, Sheridan studiously refused to compare his own political incarceration with Irish political prisoners while calling for 'Workers to fight for Scotland's rights'.

Marx's conclusion on the need for the working class in Britain to support the struggle in Ireland as an absolute precondition of its own emancipation was based on the material conditions, and revolutionary struggles arising from them, of the Irish people against British imperialism.

But in Britain today, and I deliberately include Scotland, these conditions do not exist. It is therefore no surprise that such idealist and subjective views of where struggle can emerge should arise. However, Marxists have to be able to go beyond the realm of ideas, and analyse actual material developments. Such analysis leads to the conclusion that there is in reality no struggle for national rights occurring here in Scotland. Any struggle over the Poll Tax, against unemployment etc in this context would most surely be advanced by the concrete unity of all workers.

It is clear from his letter that comrade Fox and the MSR already recognise that the Irish struggle does represent a fundamental challenge to British imperialism. On this we can agree and can work together. What we are debating is whether the material conditions, which include political consciousness, exist in Scotland at this moment which puts the issue of national rights at the centre of the struggle for the Scottish working class and for communists.

MICHAEL TAYLOR
Dundee

Reply to Robert Fox

Between now and the next issue of *FRFI*, should the oppressed of Scotland show any sign of rising up independently and seriously challenging the imperialist British state, you can be assured that the RCC would unreservedly join that struggle and attempt to lead it to ensure the victory of the working class.

This is not to reply frivolously to comrade Fox's view, but to try to set the abstract national question in a material context. When you speak of the national question's objective tendency to undermine the British state, are you not merely idealising democratic struggles for national rights which actually do challenge British imperialism, foremost amongst these the Irish struggle for self-determination? But the Irish revolutionary

FRFI sponsored walk

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Meet 28 Dean Street, W1 (Tottenham Ct Rd tube) for a sponsored walk through the London of Marx, Lenin and Engels culminating in an oration at Marx's grave and a picnic on Hampstead Heath. This unique event offers you education, history, politics, entertainment, good food, fresh air, health and fitness and a great day out. Yes, all this and a superb opportunity to raise money for the Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! publications drive!

We need to raise £2,000 for our publications fund. You can help by joining in The Great Marx March, following in the footsteps of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and help to ensure that the communist politics they represent continue to find a political expression here in Britain.

The seven-mile walk to Hampstead Heath is divided into 11 stages. Please join the march and start collecting sponsorship now. If you feel unable to take part in the march, then send off for a form and raise sponsorship money for someone else.

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HANDS OFF IRELAND!

Britain's dirty war in Ireland



Left to right: Fred Holroyd and Capt Colin Wallace both made damaging revelations concerning the activities of the British Intelligence services in Ireland; Major General Sir Frank Kitson, the leading architect of counter-insurgency strategy, including loyalist assassination squads

The Brian Nelson Affair: the British Army's Watergate?

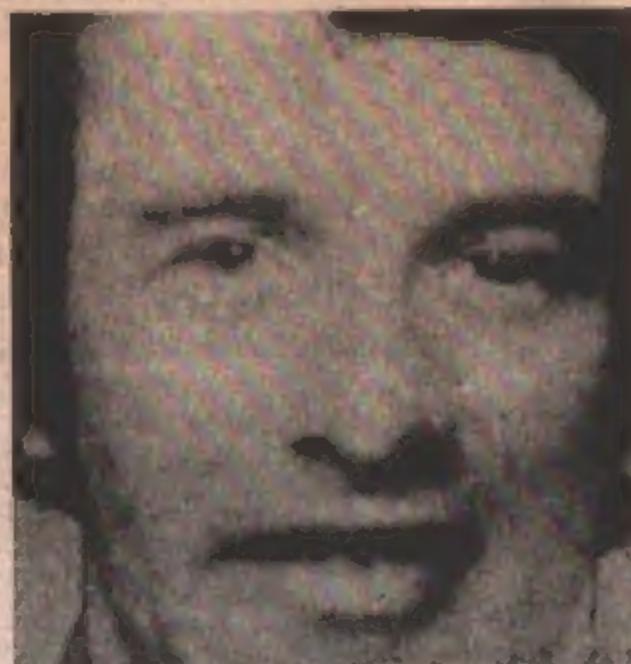
The spectre of death squads, reminiscent of those operating in South America, stalks Northern Ireland. The 'Brian Nelson Affair', some are now calling the British Army's Watergate, has for once exposed the complex and long inter-relation between British intelligence and loyalist assassination squads. BRENDAN TRACEY reports.

Central to the affair is Brian Nelson, an 'agent' recruited by the military, who conveniently rose to a useful position of intelligence officer for the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Nelson inherited a bin bag full of suspect montages/intelligence reports which originated from the 'security forces'. His first action was to give his Army handlers this bag of intelligence, not to thwart assassinations, but so Army intelligence could weed out useless and outdated information. This more refined intelligence was then handed back to Nelson so as to target Republican 'suspects' and others and was instrumental in the murders of over a dozen people and the attempted murder of several more.

The recent BBC *Panorama* programme, although painting the whole affair as an agent out of control, and implying quite strongly that if the RUC had primacy over control of agents, rather than the Army, such skullduggery would not have occurred, highlighted a disturbing sequence of events.

Using his new computerised intelligence files, Nelson targeted victims; he then, on numerous occasions, notified his contacts in the army which victims were to be killed, when, and where. The Army, instead of taking measures to ensure the attacks never occurred, deliberately allowed people to be killed. On one occasion military intelligence even got a mobile army patrol to take a photograph of a proposed victim's house as it was too risky for Nelson himself to do it. One victim was human rights lawyer Patrick Finucane, who had successfully taken cases over Britain's record in Ireland to the European Court of Human Rights. Finucane was murdered shortly after Douglas Hogg stated in the Commons that 'some solicitors were unduly sympathetic' towards Republican paramilitaries.

The Nelson Affair also exposed a number of other factors, such as the



Brian Nelson

planning of bomb attacks in the Republic of Ireland so as to influence Irish government policies. Similar claims were made by British intelligence officer Fred Holroyd in the 1970s, that agents killed three people by bombs in Dublin in 1972, the night before the Dail debate as to whether to introduce the Offences against the State Act (oppressive legislation similar to the PTA and EPA in the North).

In 1974, agents exploded bombs in Dublin and Monaghan, killing 34 people, days before the Dail discussed the introduction of the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill. It was made law and was subsequently preferred by the Irish government, but not the British, as an alternative to extradition. Extradition of Republican 'suspects' is central to British government policy of criminalising a political struggle and appeasing Unionist demands for retribution via their thirst for 'victor's justice'.

The role of Nelson and British intelligence in these events was uncovered by accident during the Stevens Inquiry into 'security force' collusion with loyalist death squads. This inquiry, which cost over £1 million, produced a report which was never published. Nelson, along with numerous UDR soldiers (but no members of the RUC) was arrested and charged with, among other things, two murders. When he came to trial the two

murder charges were dropped in the 'interest of justice'. Nelson was gaoled for only ten years. The sentence of ten years and the dropping of the murder charges was seen by many to be a deal in exchange for the non-disclosure of murderous activities involving the army which would have surely come to light during a lengthy public trial. It appears this deal was struck at the highest level.

Labour spokesman on Ireland, Kevin MacNamara, recently attempted to get an answer from Tom King, former Defence Secretary, about a letter sent by him or on his behalf to the DPP in the Six Counties while the DPP was considering the evidence against Nelson; the letter stated 'what a valuable agent Nelson had been to the army'. McNamara stated 'this is very important, because if it is true it means that a senior Cabinet Minister or subordinate acting on his behalf attempted to lean on the DPP while he was considering whether to bring charges against a man accused of the most terrible terrorist crimes... If it's true, it's another hammer blow to the questions of independence and credibility of the criminal justice system'. Tom King refused to answer and left the chamber immediately.

It seems clear the British Army was involved in targeting Republicans who they couldn't or didn't wish to bring to trial and also targeted the wider Catholic community in an attempt to heighten sectarian division and general terror. Nelson was an intricate part of this operation which was also aimed at influencing Irish government policies and getting rid of those who exposed Britain's role in Northern Ireland.

The public and political outcry over this affair has now forced the DPP to re-examine Nelson's trial transcripts. The suspicion now is that a few of Nelson's handlers will be scapegoated to save the greater involvement being exposed or that another whitewash is on the cards. If it is allowed to happen. ■

Silence reigns over British agents

A deafening silence greeted the discovery of three British agents executed by the IRA this month. The RUC refused to acknowledge the men except to comment that they were known to be petty crooks operating on the side-lines of the IRA. The British government, never slow in coming forward to condemn its enemies, hardly uttered a word apart from the characteristically banal offering from John Major that it, 'demonstrates yet again the true nature of terrorism,' though whose terrorism he is referring to is questionable. Equally dumbstruck is Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the British Labour Party - normally quick to get in first with its outraged horror at the latest 'atrocities' committed by the IRA. LOUISE CLARKE examines the silence.

The execution of Gregory Burns, Aidan Starrs and John Dignam was claimed by the IRA on the grounds the men were informers and were responsible for the murder of Margaret Perry who was murdered to prevent her exposing the three to the IRA. British intelligence and the RUC Special Branch personnel who handled the three were fully aware before and then after the event, of the full circumstances surrounding Margaret Perry's abduction and murder.

Burns is believed to have passed on information about the movements of his brother, Sean - shot dead along with Eugene Toman and Gervaise McKerr in North Armagh in 1982 in one of the RUC 'shoot-to-kill' murders subsequently investigated by John Stalker. The IRA said Burns was recruited by MI5 in 1979 and used initially to provide 'political intelligence' on Sinn Fein and anti-H Block activists in the early 1980s.

His 'career' as an informer progressed with him being dispatched to Amsterdam to infiltrate the Irish community there. In 1987 he was told to infiltrate the North Armagh Brigade of the IRA, via Aidan Starrs. From his position within the IRA, Burns regularly passed on information about weapons and dumps.

The IRA's official statement said: 'In the wake of an extensive investigation into the actions of MI5, British intelligence, the RUC Special Branch and a number of individuals in North Armagh and following duly constitutional courts-martial, the IRA has carried out the execution of a British intelligence agent and two RUC Special Branch informers. The three were IRA members who have been under suspicion since the autumn of 1990 over allegations

(since proven) of corruption and extortion. The three were also responsible for the abduction and brutal murder of Margaret Perry who was murdered to prevent her exposing the three to the IRA. British intelligence and the RUC Special Branch personnel who handled the three were fully aware before and then after the event, of the full circumstances surrounding Margaret Perry's abduction and murder.'

The IRA statement reveals the elaborate RUC and MI5 methods of using and handling informers. In order to win Burns' psychological dependence, his handlers advised him he was in danger of being exposed as an informer. They advised him to 'confess' to being approached and call a press conference to publicly reject the advances of British intelligence.

By doing this and by claiming expert knowledge of how to build arms dumps - which he was taught by military intelligence - Burns was able to win the IRA's confidence to such an extent that he rose to the post of quartermaster in the North Armagh Brigade. But Burns, Starrs and Dignam were not political soldiers. By the end of 1990 they were engaged in extortion for personal ends. It was about this that the IRA initially investigated them.

The IRA's swift and determined actions in ridding itself of British agents has exposed just the tip of a dirty heap of British intelligence tactics in the war against the Irish people.

The IRA's message was clear: agents will not be tolerated. The responsibility for the 'atrocities' lies in the lap of the British state. ■



Gregory Burns in West Belfast, 1987, alleging that he had been abducted by British Intelligence